



# MEMORIZE

BOOK 01

로유진

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# MEMORIZE

(主宰之王)

by

**Eugene**

(로유진)

# Synopsis

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A man who had lost everything.

An almighty power, the [Zero Code] held within his hand.

“Player Kim Su Hyun, do you truly wish to revert the time of Hall Plain?”

“I want to go back 10 years. To that period when I first came here.”

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# Episode 1 - Zero Code, Turning Back 10 Years

## (1)

< Player Status >

Name: Kim Su-Hyun (10 Years)

Class: Normal, Sword User, Master

Affiliated Nation: Terra

Affiliated Clan: -

Title: Contemplates the World wanting Seclusion, Zenith (頂上)

Nationality: South Korean

Gender: Male (33 yrs.old)

Height: 181.5cm.

Weight: 75.5kg

Alignment: Lawful · Chaos

[Strength 86] [Resistance 92] [Agility 96] [Vitality 78] [Magic Power 48] [Luck 36]

Attribute Point: 0 points remaining

< Achievements (21) >

< Special Ability (1/1) >

< Latent Ability (4/4) >

Nothing came to mind. Numbness permeated as I flicked the small marble in my left hand.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun.”

10 years. In that long time, I accomplish what I yearned for, what I dreamed of. But, it didn't disappear. I was still filled and tormented by the feeling of loss and coldness in my heart.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. Will you permit me to ask again?”

The quiet, but beautiful silvery voice knocked on my ear. Pulled by the voice, I gradually lifted my head. The more I came about, the more I was haunted by the ashen brick floor. When my vision was filled with a space reaching 30 坪, my gradually widening sight stopped.

That which announces the start of all things, and forms all ends, the ‘Room of Summoning.’ In the centre of the room was a rectangular altar, and on top of the altar, a translucent wing swayed shining a white light. Filled with the feeling of emptiness, I focused my sight on the ‘Angel’ sitting on the alter.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun, I shall reconfirm your request. Do you truly wish to revert the time of Hall Plain?”

“Yes.”

Slowly nodding my head, I stare at the angel in front of me. Looks that would be praised as pinnacle of beauty, skin that was flawless and smooth, the risque clothes which hinted at her body. All of this had eyes only for me.

But no desire swelled up in me. Even with Angel's beauty, or her loving gaze. Nothing could make my already dead heart to react. Since that 'day', I had lost all feeling.

"I cannot consent to this. Every Angel including me, cannot understand you."

"No, you are mistaken. I had never wished for your kind's understanding, Seraph."

My ear picked up my own voice, it was cold. The Angel, Seraph, unusually her voice was trembling slightly today. Except for today, I cannot even remember once where she had disagreed with me. Did what I said really that unsettling?

There was a hint of assent, but Seraph had immediately recovered her blank expression. She began to admonish me with her subdued, but a courteous voice.

"Player Kim Su-Hyun, you have accomplished all the mission of Hall Plain and became the first player to grasp it's pinnacle."

"So."

“‘So’ is not the answer. That you have earnestly longed for, the Zero Code has been attained. You have ‘entitlement.’ With the boundary of ‘entitlement,’ you can accomplish whatever you want.”

“Seraph. The discussion’s already over.”

“Return to Earth? Acceptable. You can return to Earth retaining all your abilities. Remain in Hall Plain? Also Acceptable. With the Zero Code you can become the ruler over the whole continent, no, you can become an even greater existence than a king.”

She didn’t seem like she would end anytime soon. Giving out a large sigh, I rested my right hand near my hips. My hand came to rest on a familiar handle of a blade.

“Sigh, 10 years of swallowing your flattery is enough. I tire of it. Seraph? I shall speak no longer. No matter what words you use to entice me, I shall not reconsider the use of the Zero Code.”

Grasping the handle tightly to the breaking point, I awakened my magic power. As if she read the rising energy from my body, Seraph closed her lips in an instant. But even that was momentary. Her ever watching face was etched with worry. Seem she still had not given up trying to persuade my course of action.

“The complete ownership of Zero Code is within the Player Kim Su-Hyun’s hand. We do not have the jurisdiction to touch it. Therefore it is so much more regretful. Using the item harbouring such almighty power to simply turning back time is, illogical.”

“.....”

“I shall confirm for the final time. Player Kim Su-Hyun, do you truly wish to repeat the 10 years of torment?”

Seraph’s voice was close to sad pleading by the end. Suddenly, reasonless laughter erupted from me. This was as exactly as described, a laughter without reason.

I laughed silently for a long while.

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This was not Earth. This was completely different to the simple day's people were blessed with, ‘Hall Plain,’ a different world where something occurred outside the bounds of an ordinary routine.

I closed my eyes gently, and retrospectively retraced everything that I had experienced one by one.

First time I had arrived in Hall Plain, it was 10 years ago, when I was 23 years old with the whole future before me. The last memories I have of Earth was me happily returning home from 2 years of army training. That was the only thing I can dredge up.

After reporting my discharge from the military and during my return trip home, I fell asleep on the train. When I came about, I was summoned to this very ‘Room of Summoning.’ As I gained full

awareness, an Angel that only existed in imagination was in front of me, with her wings gently swaying about.

A situation I didn't know anything about, or could have done anything about. Buoyant by the dream of finally going home, the situation was no different than being thunderstruck.

This was no dream or imagination. As I came to the realization of this reality, I pleaded with the Angel to return me home. But I was moved to the next place called, 'Rite of Passage,' a place that ascertain my entitlement. In that place, I saw monsters for the first time in my life, I was pursued and forced to finish the test against my will.

The test duration was set for 7 days. Set in a battlefield with constant struggle for survival. Sunk into innumerable life threatening situation, I hanged onto dear life for a week to be earn the entitlement of 'Player (User)' to enter the world of 'Hall Plain.'

But the Rite of Passage did not end there. The true start was at Hall Plain itself. If the Rite of Passage was a battle of life and death, Hall Plain was true hell where only death awaited.

And the start of my life in Hall Plain.

I wanted to live. Because I wanted to live, I adapted to this abnormal world called 'Hall Plain' with desperation. I clinged all my hope to the Angel's word that I could return once I reached the end, I staggered through 10 years of existence. Yes, I only wanted to live and return. With all my loved ones that I could not break.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. What are you thinking so deeply about? Perhaps your thoughts.....”

As the words ‘loved one’ came about, a rush of emotions arose. I shook my head violently. Being trapped in my reminiscence was not the important issue.

“Ah, I was just thinking some old thoughts. By the way, repeating 10 years of torment.... To see you use such words, do you at least have some shred of conscience?”

“.....”

“Yes. Thanks to your kinds, I experienced anguish I did not have to. No less than 10 years of it.”

“Player Kim Su-Hyun.”

As if she was trying to read my state of mind, Seraph’s eyes were observing my every point. The instant I tried to tell her to quit it, her beautiful lips opened and a tranquil voice poured out.

“Perhaps, if Player Kim Su-Hyun is thinking about Player Han So Yung..... I believe I understand what is it you want. Player Kim Su-Hyun. I have a very reasonable proposition. With the currently possessed GP, you have amassed enough points to invoke several wishes. You need not be so obstinate about using the Zero Code to return to the past.....”

‘I don’t want to admit it, but that bastard was right.’

I knew such words would come out. Even before Seraph’s finished her speech, I pulled out my sword from its sheath and with all my strength whirled it.

PING!

The sharp piercing tone of the wind being ripped to threads. The wave I shot shook the altar Seraph was sitting on. Though that was all it did. The wave dissipated without a trace against the pure white shell she created.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun..... I understand your sentiment, but that was meaningless. I believe you yourself already realise this.”

I already did. Players could not harm the Angels. Regardless, the reason I pull my sword was to vehemently reaffirm that I was determined on this course of action.

“Astaroth told me as such the moment he died. That in the end, you were cut from the same cloth.”

“Will you now believe in the words of a devil? You of all people?”

“Is it not the truth? That is not permissible, this is not permissible. In the end, there is no difference.”

“Pause, pause the conversation.... I believe you have sufficiently clarified your request.”

“You do not have ‘entitlement.’ That is not permissible without ‘entitlement.’ Why are you so dissatisfied when I even told you I would go back and make the gain ‘entitlement’?”

“Su Hyun!”

PING! PING!

“Be quiet, I haven’t blocked my ears. Also, used the Player title like you always do.”

Again the waves flew at her and disappeared. As if she couldn’t believe the sudden outburst, she stared at me with melancholic eyes. Regardless I fixed my grip on the fiercely shining sword that was measured at her. As I pumped magic power into it, small sprouts of deep blue flames began to soar. Staring at the tip of the sword, Seraph gnawed her lip.

“I shall warn you for the last time. Remove your sword at once. No matter what setting you are allowed to use, your origin is Human. Please allow me to clarify that it's a miscalculation to think you can kill a Far Dimensional Class being”

“Really? Should we test it out? Leaving off everything and using the Zero Code for the entitlement to kill your kind should work.”

“You have the clear authority in its use. Though to complete the activation of Zero Code, it must go through us unconditionally. Please abandon your fruitless dream.”

“You are confident. Is there really no other way?”

“Su..... Player Kim Su-Hyun. Ple..... This is a meaningless altercation. Though.....”

Seraph seems to have more to say as her lips stumbled. But as if she felt the blossoming, cold rage from the sword and earnest emotion that followed with it, she closed her mouth tightly.

“.....”

“.....”

Momentarily, the heavy silence clouded over between Seraph and I. I settled my boiling agitation and let the sword down slowly. With my desolate spirit I lifted the Zero Code that was clasped in my left hand. A dark blue light was brooding within the small, alluring piece of marble. Really, this small thing.....

“Seraph. I do not wish to fight, or talk about this any longer. If you truly understand my heart, and you truly have my best interest. I entrust you.”

Seeped in sorrow, as soon as I spoke of ‘entrust,’ Seraph’s eyes became suddenly wide. I stretched out the hand holding the Zero Code in her direction. Now, I was completely certain in my decision.

“I shall request again. I want to go back 10 years. That time when I first entered here, to that specific period.”

As if it read my sincere determination, at that moment, the dark light that gave off from the Zero Code erupted to a bright haloes of light. I opened that hand that was tightly grasping the Zero Code. The brilliantly shining sphere floated gently, it drew a very thin parabola as it flew toward Seraph. She accepted the sphere with a vacant expression.

Seraph’s empty gaze met with mine and became entangled in space. How long we must have spent looking at each other. Her lips, slowly, very slowly opened.

“If that is what you truly wish.”

“.....”

“I shall respect your wishes.”

“Seraph.”

As Seraph blankly looked at me, her spiritless face spoke again.

“Please do not misinterpret what I am about to say. I spoke before, Player Kim Su-Hyun, you are currently in possession of considerable GP. To let it disappear like this is not a rational action.”

I shook my head left to right at Seraph’s words. I was going to go back so what was the use of the Gold Point (GP)? But it seems Seraph had a different idea, she manipulated her hands so fast that it couldn’t be seen by the naked eye.

“This is an unbelievable occurrence, your determination has awakened a reaction from the Zero Code. Acceptable. By my authority as your Assistant, I shall take care of the specific matters at my discretion. Of course, User Kim Su-Hyun will not see a scrap of the work required. I shall see you once again as soon as the work is complete.”

After the work is complete? See me soon? The instant I was about to ask how I could exchange words when she sprouted things that made absolute no sense, the moment I was about to open my mouth, the Room of Summoning was filled with a grand voice I had never heard before.

“Received User Kim Su-Hyun’s request. 27%, 58%, 77% 100%. Loading.... Approved. Access granted. Right now Code Name Zero shall commence. Please be ready.”

Grrrr. Krrggrrrrrrr.

From nowhere, a sound similar to rusted machinery moving could be heard. Simultaneously, the Zero Code that entered Seraph's bosom, shined with a clear, bright light that scattered in the air.

Paah!

Light so bright that it stung the eye continued to pour forth. The sound of rusted machinery filled the background. An indescribable and eerie sensation rippled through my whole body and passed by. This was not unfamiliar. The sensation of space being twisted, and the feeling of something flying by. The sensation closely resembled the world being distorted when the Great Prince of Hell made an appearance in the battle to recapture Atlanta.

As more time passed, the radiant light covered Seraph completely that I could no longer see her figure. Before long, I closed my eyes, whatever will be will be.

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Notes:

평:- Phonetic: Phyung(坪) is about 3.3 squared meter.

사용자 - There is a mixture of English in the raw, the word User/Player is intermingled by the author.

[Gamedev.stackexchange](https://gamedev.stackexchange.com/questions/111111/what-is-the-difference-between-user-and-player) this Sean Middleditch explains it quite well:

“The user profile is handling a service that deals only with users.

The simulation server deals with in-game things. The simulation server has an ID that corresponds to each user, so its Player class might look something like:

```
struct Player  
{ UserId _user;  
  playerId _player;  
  int _health; // etc.};”
```

Technically as the alternative dimension can be considered as a ‘simulation server,’ Player would be the right definition. At the end, as the Zero Code is affecting the ‘User Account,’ and the term has been used as such.

자격 - Qualification would be a better literal fit, but in terms of the story and tone, I decided ‘entitlement’ would be the better diction.

## Episode 2 - Zero Code, Turning Back 10 Years (2)

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When the light that was unceasingly hammering my eyelid began to gradually weaken, I gently opened my eyes. Only traces of that brilliant light that filled the whole room remained, and was slowly disappearing. As I blink several times, my hazy sight came into focus. While later, when I recovered enough that I would not misestimate things, I began to calmly observe my surroundings.

‘It’s different.’

In the moment that I closed my eyes, so many things had changed. The sword that was in my right hand, the equipment I wore all had disappeared into thin air. Looking down towards my empty hands, I noticed the camouflage patterns of a military fatigue. When I saw the tag attached to my left breast pocket, I held my breath. Then.

“Code Name Zero. Complete. Confirming the activation of Zero Code. Confirmed. Activation Normal. User Kim Su-Hyun, Congratulations.”

A familiar voice made me look up, Seraph was sitting on the altar, still focused on me. I furrowed my brows as I spoke. Just looking at her, I could see her state was abnormal and severe.

“Why do you stare at me so?”

Her alluring white wings that swayed behind her were so transparent it could no longer be seen. Her whole body was translucent that I could see through her. Only her expressionless face was the same as before.

Maintaining my silence, tilting her head Seraph spoke.

“It feels like a long time since I have been a target of your worried gaze. But do not worry. Right now in Earth Time, it is the year 2011 month 12 day 27 of a Thursday. By your request, time has been reverted to the period when Earth Kim Su-Hyun has first entered the ‘Summon Room.’ Again, let me reiterate, Player Kim Su-Hyun’s request has been successfully processed and compiled.”

“Yes.... Of course. Then Seraph, did you came back with me?”

As I spoke softly, Seraph responded by shaking her head gently in a negative.

“While I cannot give an exact description, for now, I shall answer it as NO. User Kim Su-Hyun, there are still things yet to explain and so I have asked the Zero Code a momentary respite. Fortunately, it seems the Zero Code has deemed my points adequate as it accepted my request.”

“Some things to explain?”

“Yes. As you say.”

Still seen the frown on my brows, Seraph just gently smiled in return. In all my 10 years in Hall Plain, it was the first time seeing such smile on the Angel. The abruptness of her frank forthcoming made me unknowingly relax my frown.

That awkward atmosphere from before had subsided. Rather than me, it was Seraph who had opened her mouth first to speak. Tucking in her silvery white hair behind her ear, she spoke with her eyes half closed.

“I remember the day when User Kim Su-Hyun was first summoned to Hall Plain. Do you recall what you said when you first saw me?”

“Don’t know.”

There is no way I could remember such thing. I don’t know what cock and bull story she was trying to tell, but I decided to listen to it calmly. Seraph was an ‘Assistant,’ an existent that always at the minimum gave the most appropriate advice.

“Whe, where am I? Uh? Wh, who are you! Was what you said.”

“Really, even my stuttering? You remember some useless things.”

“Huhu. That’s not all. After that....”

PAJAAK!

A sound of space being torn could be heard. In the middle of her exasperating tale, Seraph's whole body warped. Like a TV that could not receive signal, her body distortion like a static white screen.

“Hhk!”

She warped and snapped back to normal. Seraph gave out a pained moan, as her state cycled back and forth, her transparency became worse and worse. Her appearance was becoming so strange to look at. If I opened and closed my eyes, it felt like I would see her normal tranquil self again. But like a candle in the wind, Seraph looked frail.

After a while, as the noise phenomenon lessened, Seraph straightened her body with a bitter expression on her face.

“My desire for authorization from the Zero Code is difficult to gain. Though we spent 10 years together..... Authorization for the time to discuss the affection of our regretful parting has been denied.”

‘Ah, I really can't adjust.’

The old her would have never uttered such words, rather she would have entered the main discourse straight away. As Seraph said, Angels as a Race were defined by rationality. Having been on the receiving end of their conspicuously same demeanour for the last 10 years, I just couldn't adapt to the sudden change in her

attitude.

“So.... Yes, then let’s finish the discussion quickly.”

In the end, I replied brusquely. Staring at me with her sorrowful eyes, Seraph gave a short sigh before continuing.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun, since mid-game you have barely consumed any GP. Utilising some points you have earned up till now, I thought to bestow several privileges upon your restart.”

“Um? Privileges?”

“Of course, I shall leave in your possession the remaining GP.”

“Privileges.... I don’t know what that is but receiving such service for reaching the end. I am crying tears of joy.”

At my mostly sarcastic remark, Seraph shook her head to fix my assumption.

“I would appreciate if you would acknowledge this as goodwill rather than a service. I, including all the Angels, understand your sentiments sufficiently, we empathise and sympathise.”

“Sympathise? Hahaha.....”

“I apologise if you heard ‘sympathize’ with a negative connotation. I held no intention of debasement. But, we Angels still upholds the minimum duty of aiding the Players in Hall Plain. Had I ever mislead Player Kim Su-Hyun with my counsel? Please think careful. Accept this goodwill, or pass it by, I shall entrust this entirely in Player Kim Su-Hyun’s hand.”

She said she would entrust it to me, but as if she was forcing me to take it, Seraph had given me hardly any leeway to refute this ‘goodwill.’ Although I wanted to ask her more question, I was drawing a blank. Uneasy, I nodded.

“Excellent choice. I have no doubt with this selection Player Kim Su-Hyun’s will have a markedly easier path.”

The moment I expressed my agreement, the expression of her eyes were conspicuously relieved and narrowed in a smile. And for what seemed to be the last time, she gave a mighty beat with her faint wings. The distance between me and her vanished in an instant, and I could feel a soft hand above my head. As I furtively looked above, Seraph spoke with a relaxed voice.

“Though this may be unpleasant, please be patient. Not much time is left. I shall begin the transfer of the information directly into your mind.”

As Seraph finished speaking, I felt a shock flash by where she laid her hand on the crown of my head. There was no pain. Rather fascinatingly, the information Seraph was transferring was embedded directly into my mind. With my eyes closed, I calmly savoured the information.

1. Player Kim Su-Hyun is granted the privilege of retaining the data of his possessed attributes. First, you shall be able to 'load' your first round's character information. Second, from the 6 attributes you possess, 4 will be randomly chosen and enhanced. The percentage of enhancement will also be random.

2. You are granted the privileges concerning Class. Before your 'Rite of Passage,' you will be able to confirm your Class. Not only the ordinary Class but Rare, Secret Class included, the Class wrapped in secrets will be opened to you.

3. You are granted the privileges concerning Special Ability and Latent Ability. Ordinarily, Players are allowed 1 slot for Special Ability and 4 slots for Latent Ability. Player Kim Su-Hyun's Latent Ability slot will be expanded by 1. Including this, the Hidden Ability, Special Ability and Latent Ability slots will be freed up, with the selection choice given to the Player.

With a different process, the 'Unique Ability' slot can be opened. The Unique Ability is applicable above the Special Ability. If you abandon the Unique Ability, 1 Special Ability slot and 5 Latent Ability slot will be freed up for the Player's desired selection. (At this point, the expanded slot will be automatically applied to the Latent Ability)

But if you chose to accept a Unique Ability, a Latent Ability will be consumed. Only half of the remaining 4 slot will be freed up for the Player's desired selection. (The other 2 slot will be filled up at random.)

4. For 1 time only, you will be able to receive a body modification procedure.

5. Player Kim Su-Hyun shall be permitted to choose one equipment with no type restriction. EX ranked equipment cannot be selected.

Without rest, a clutter of information concerning privileges was filling up my head. With mixed feelings, I opened my eyes. Only a vague outline of Seraph could be seen now. Though she had yet to move her hand from my head, I no longer felt the previous touches.

With great difficulty, I sorted out the transferred information. I gave out a quiet groan.

“This is....”

Truth be told, I could not in my wildest dream imagine such privileges to be bestowed and was left astonished. If I could truly start off with this privileges, it was no different to starting a game at the character creation page.

As if she read my mind, Seraph gave a trifling smile as she spoke.

“These privileges has been created from Player Kim Su-Hyun’s procured points. Of course, I would not deny that my goodwill has some input. Having the consent of the communion of Angels power, there should not be the slightest of problems..”

“I like them, but you will eventually disappear. So won't I be restrained by checks and balance?”

“Not so. From Player Kim Su-Hyun's inflection just now, I detected a hint of conceit. Time and again I have reminded you for the past 10 years, inattention in any situation is prohibited.”

“I will pay attention. But won't balance be a problem. Think about it, what would the other recently joined Players think when I start off with these privileges?”

“Please do not worry as that part can be resolved through Tanay. In terms of balance.... Of course, the balance has been thought of....”

Stopping for a second, Seraph tried to read my countenance. Then with a hesitant voice, she began to speak cautiously.

“Taking into consideration Player's Kim Su-Hyun's original latent potential, this, on the contrary, can be seen as fixing the balance.”

There were so many implications in what she said, but I could pick up what she meant immediately. In reality, ‘latent potential’ was a crucial key in deciding the ‘Player Information.’

While I could fathom Seraph's meaning, I wondered why it still left a bitter taste in my mouth.

No matter what anyone says, I was the only Player who has reached the zenith of Hall Plain. It was through countless miracles and mishaps that I had climbed to this point from rock bottom, I held no thought to deny it. But wasn't there such saying? That it's not the strong that survives, but the one who survives that's strong.

If I was speaking about ordinary strength, then I was confident enough to say I was strong. Of course, I knew without a doubt that I could not be referred to as the best, the strongest. But however you put it.....

“...Whew.”

“Being self-conceited is prohibited. Please be vigilant.”

In the end, I felt this was not what Seraph wished to convey. As if she made me aware of my self-conceitedness, I suddenly felt disheartened. Giving out a short sigh, I nodded. After all, her words were not wrong, and only my ego was slightly wounded. But as I gazed at Seraph's form, it was now hardly recognisable and very indistinctive, that I relented immediately.

“Truly.... The time to depart.... Has come....”

As Seraph said, the end was almost upon us. Like a TV screen on the brink of breaking, she constantly warped and distorted. Seraph no longer returned to her original shape. That, I could only stare at that vacantly.

“There is.... You.... Something.... Really.... Say....”

Gradually, Seraph words could no longer be heard. Slowly but surely, her presence was disappearing. Even then, Seraph continued to speak desperately.

“That.... Really....”

“Seraph. I know this is the end and I am sorry, but I can’t hardly hear you.”

Still, as if she heard what I said, Seraph’s face was submerged in sadness. But in this situation, there was nothing I could do. In the first place, this was something I desired, something I brought on myself. But she did not give up.

“Ple.... ase....”

PHAK!

As it seemed the noise was becoming worse, the white light made a sudden Phak sound and flashed. Around Seraph, several brilliant rays of light appeared and winked out. The end was finally upon us. Seraph chewed her lip once, and strength seems to fill her eyes as she slowly parted her lips.

“Please be happy.....”

Sarururu.....

With her last words, Seraph disappeared. No longer did the noise phenomenon occur. But her last words, the words she divulges with all her strength, remained in my ears. In her last moment, I thought she gave me a spirited smile, but I was so focused on her words I wasn't so sure.

For a brief moment, I just continued to stare absentmindedly at where Seraph was sitting.

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Notes:

Something to take note, I think this is probably lost in most Korean -> English translations, but Seraph is talking in very formally. In Korean speech level, it's described as "Hasipsio-che." Seraph's tone, again, is very formal and also has a machine like feel. I really hope I managed to do her justice.

## Episode 3 - Seraph, Is Flustered (1)

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I had turned back 10 years of time. Seraph, whom I had spent 10 years together, was gone.

‘What happens now....?’

In a moment, an Angel would be summoned on top of the now empty altar. A new Angel could appear, but Seraph could also be summoned once more. If the former happened, it wouldn't really matter. But what would happen if the later occurred? I guess she would appear without any memories of our time together, but maybe....

After waiting for 3 minutes, I felt a response. The empty space above the altar began to lash out like the waves in the ocean. In my first life, I would probably have lost conscience right about now. Having never observed the process of an Angel being summoned, I looked on at the spectacle with great interest.

Like a ripple on the surface of the water, a pure white light poured out, humming out a dissonance of concentric circles. For a moment I thought the light would waver out, but it exploded like fireworks creating an explosion of white light. From the light, a shape began to form. I didn't want to miss anything leading to the formation of the new Angel.

Before long, the generation process was complete and an Angel could be seen above the altar. While Angel's eyes were still closed, the appearance was so very familiar. The undulating wings that

exuded divinity. The sublime elegance one would hardly dare approach, the prideful splendour emanating an imposing detachedness. Lacking no difference, the now revealed Angel was perfectly and completely identical in appearance to Seraph.

As if she felt my eyes on her, Seraph slowly opened her eyes. In a short moment, her conspicuous, light green eyes crossed my face and passed me by.

Beautiful, and noble.

Seraph, like the Angels in novels and manhwa, exuded an overflowing aura of peace and holiness that was impossible to describe with words alone.

Her silvery hair looked like it was waxed from moonlight, full of silky lustre that meticulously flowed out. Her ivory skin was like white snow, no imperfection could be found on her resplendent and delicate complexion. Her turquoise pupils inside her light double eyelids gleamed. Even that faint hint of her skin...

But even with that delicate and exquisite appearance, not a hint of lust arose within me. First of all, we were beings of different dimensions. I am sure even the basic emotional response would be completely different.

Seraph seemed surprised that I was still awake as her eyes snapped back to me. Her placid eyes were searching my every nook and cranny as if she was observing a new specimen. Feeling her ever familiar gaze, I could now be completely certain.

‘Seraph. So this is you 10 years ago.’

At that moment, Seraph opened her lovely lips.

“I am pleased to meet you.”

“Hmm.”

“Welcome to the Room of Summoning. Planet, Earth. Hailing nationality, the Republic of South Korea. Age, 23. Name, Kim Su-Hyun. Principal confirmation complete. For convenience, Human Kim Su-Hyun will from now be referred to as Player. I am called Seraph, an Assistant who shall be in charge of your guidance from now on.”

“Hmm.”

“Player Kim Su-Hyun, in this Room of Summoning, I shall inform you of the basic knowledge you require. Afterwards, you are scheduled to be transferred to what is known as the ‘Rite of Passage.’ In that place, you are expected to earn the entitlement of becoming a true Player.”

“Hmm.”

“.....”

The rapid speaking Seraph closed her mouth. Tilting her head, her expression spoke volumes ‘this isn’t right.’ Seeing such expression on Seraph, I felt slightly elated. But first, I should get what I should get.

“There is one thing I am curious about....”

“I must recommend that you avoid questions such as where this place is or why the principal is in this place. There are merely 2 hours left before you are to enter the Rite of Passage. Of course, I understand that this current situation is confusing. But if you want to live, if you want to return....”

Seraph must have thought she was on the right track again as she kicked off her rapid-fire speech again. One could say by now, the person would have adapted to the situation. But truthfully, the first time around I was full of fear. The blank, expressionless face and the emotionless tone, it felt like I was speaking with a ghost.

Think of back then, laughter poured forth. After my abrupt giggling, I spoke more somberly.

“Ah. Indeed.”

“I recommend with the time allocated, the Player use it to maximise his understanding of the current situation....”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“.....”

Although I acquiesced obediently, a slight scowl appeared on Seraph's brows. Her hands floated in the air sluggishly, her eyes blinked several times as she mumbled brokenly.

“Negative on mental illness.... Subject currently emotionally calm. How peculiar.”

“Who are you calling a psychopath.... No, that doesn't matter. Seraph, is it not preferable for you to follow what I say?”

“That is correct.”

“Then that's that, so what's with your muttering.”

“Negative, I am not muttering. In any case, this is acceptable. Player Kim Su-Hyun's attitude is preferable. If you can maintain such attitude, the chance of survival shall rise dramatically. Therefore, firstly....”

This time, I just put my hands in the air. Seraph seemed to finally catch my signal as she stopped speaking again.

“I said I was curious about something.”

“Is that so. Acceptable. If the question doesn't pertain to the subjects discuss before, I shall make a special exception.”

“No not that. Isn’t there something you need to give me?”

“Question query is ‘give?’ The precise meaning behind the question has not been understood. Please specify further.”

“Hmm~. Ah, I think I just need to say Tanay?”

“!”

The moment I spoke ‘Tanay,’ Seraph began to tremble so noticeably my eyes could pick it up. I knew this would happen. The response was amusing but, I was slightly worried that at this rate I would not be able to receive my privileges. But I couldn’t give up. For now, I was of the thought to do anything in my power to get it, so with reproaching tone, I began to ease the topic.

“Tanay, it was definitely Tanay. Sure, starting off as you please is okay, but I should get what I should get....”

“.....”

Seraph recovered in an instant, but it was only her expression that recovered. I could see clearly how much effort she was putting into hiding her restless unease. The usual gentle and swaying manner was not present on her wings, as it flailed wildly. Without a doubt, she was greatly flustered.

“Ple, please wait a moment.”

Seraph promptly closed her eyes. Then her fingers began to type in the air with incredible speed, her lips were unceasing in some muttering. She was probably confirming Tanay and conversing with the other Angels.

Enough time passed to finish a cup of tea. During that time, Seraph displayed so many different expressions. I kept my silence as I watched the spectacle. With how rare the sight before me was, I did not felt any boredom as time passed by.

Finally, Seraph opened her eyes. Her expression told me she still wasn't convinced.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun, I would like to converse with you.”

“Don't wanna.”

“Just a moment will do.”

“I must recommend that you avoid questions such as where this place is or why the principal is in this place. There are merely 2 hours left before you are to enter the Rite of Passage. Of course, I understand that this current situation is confusing. But.... Um, what else did I say?”

Realising she was repeating what she said in verbatim, she immediately shut her mouth.

“Anyway, as you said there isn’t much time till I have to go to the Rite of Passage.... Give me what you should, and I will take what I should. Won’t this be a rational course of action?”

I am emphasised ‘rational’ on purpose. Seraph began to chew on her lips. Yes. This must be so vexing. I am sure she had never been manoeuvred and pushed back in a conversation with a human.

Truthfully, I really wanted to experience this. The first time I came here, Seraph’s response was very distant and cold. The feeling back then, how do I say it... Was it like she was looking at me like a lab rat? Pretending not to have heard any of my pleas to take me back home, immediately being thrown down when I was running hither and thither as I threw a tantrum.

Well, I am not completely sure if the last bit actually happened. But regardless, this situation was like a sweet, pleasant offering.

With such pleasant feeling wafting in my heart, a relaxed smile automatically plastered on my face. Seraph was giving me a blank stare when she lightly snapped her finger.

TAK!

Slapping of the skin was heard and my surrounding flow slowed. With my body being in its initial state I could not feel it precisely, but the scraps and pieces of experienced gain in my 10 years did not just disappear.

Shortly after, Seraph spoke.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun’s assertion is rational. Therefore, the lost time shall be recompensed. Currently, the flow of time surrounding the Room of Summoning has been slowed. Is this to your satisfaction?”

“Hmm.”

I replied stoically. Seraph, for a moment, observed me very scrupulously before quietly opening her mouth to speak.

“I, however, possess some curiosity concerning Player Kim Su-Hyun. However, if this displeases you, I shall prohibit myself from asking.”

“Ah, really? I was just going to tell you anyway but if you are sure....”

But I wanted to tease her more, so I squared my shoulders as Seraph’s eyes began to sparkle.

“Ah, is that so? Assuredly every Assistants, including myself, have fallen into turmoil. If possible, we would like to hear the whole story.”

“But I don’t wanna.”

Seraph seemed to have realised I was playing with her, as in that moment, both of her cheeks began to blush red. I wanted to laugh out loud and applause as I saw it. Shooting me a pouty face, she began to calmly readjust.

“Actions that cross the line can be appropriately sanctioned, however, the 1st principle of all Assistants is that we are not to inflict any harm to the Player. With that in mind, please eschew the cheeky remarks while conversing with the Assistants.”

“You are a different Dimensional being possessing the Distant Class, aren’t you? I am sure you can forgive me with your deep benevolence.”

“.... The Tanay you spoke of, confirmation, completed. Payment has already been settled. This is a one of a kind pledge carrying an enforcement of ‘cancellation not allowed.’ After a detailed scrutiny of the power granted by these privileges, it has been ascertained that Player Kim Su-Hyun is perfectly within the right of ownership.”

“Hmph. You acquiesced too quickly. That’s no fun.”

“For us, Tanay holds such meaning. While examination is possible, we can exert no other influence. Therefore the privileges granted to Player Kim Su-Hyun cannot be retracted. Please be at ease.”

“But if I start from year 0 with this strength, will I not become an

anomaly? For example, won't the Balance fall out of equilibrium or.....”

“This does not exert any influence on the Balance.”

Seraph, without hesitation, had replied back curtly. Her expression became slightly stern as she continued.

“I have read the data on Balance. There were many details that went completely beyond scope. But please be aware, being self-conceited is prohibited. Even if you were to accept all your privileges, that does not mean other beings with great powers does not exist.”

Even now, Seraph was being Seraph as she repeated the exact same words. Regardless, her confirmation was enough. The past evaluation of ‘receiving immeasurable amount’ was now dramatically different. I decided to accept it meekly.

“Right, there is no need to focus on the level of Players. There are still plenty of greater beings in Hall Plain.”

“That is right.”

When she heard ‘Hall Plain,’ Seraph’s eye became wide open.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun, in order to apply all the privileges, I predict much more time is needed. Time currently left is 1 hour, 47 minutes and 26 seconds. Time is too tight to make the Rite of

Passage. This is my speculation, but you seemed to already understand the inner workings of Hall Plain....”

“Ok. That omission. That was something I wanted in the beginning.”

“I have artificially manipulated the time to flow slower, but I can only confine the extension within the compensated time. In the process of moving to the next phase, the allocated time is expected to be consumed. Please wait a moment.”

While Seraph was preparing, I was sunked into the thought of the Rite of Passage.

The Rite of Passage can be simply described as ‘a place of test for Player to validate their entitlement.’ A place that kidnapped people like me who didn’t even know a smidgen of English. There were only two conditions to pass the test. Survive for what they say is 7 days, or arrive at the Warp Gate within 7 days. In other words ‘survival’ is meant to be the necessary requirement.

The people who survive are brought back to the Room of Summoning. Then, they receive a Class that fits their potential and for the first time, enter the true reality(實在) that is Hall Plain. No matter how you look at it, it’s a terrifying and unfair test. Those who cannot sufficiently meet the survival requirements, received the ‘death’ judgement as is.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. All preparations complete.”

While I had fallen into meandering in my thoughts, I received the signal from Seraph that all preparations were complete.

“The detailed content of the privileges....”

“I already know. All of it is in my head, so it will be good if we can start immediately.”

“Acknowledge. I shall understand that you do not require any transfer of knowledge. Then, which privilege will you accept first?”

“Hmm....”

In order, the first ability came to mind.

‘1. Player Kim Su-Hyun is granted the privilege of retaining the data of his possessed attributes. First, you shall be able to ‘load’ your first round’s character information. Second, from the 6 attributes you possess, 4 will be randomly chosen and enhanced. The percentage of enhancement will also be random.’

I could not wantonly apply the privileges as I felt like it. There must have been a reason for Seraph to assign such order. Therefore, applying the 1st privilege was the right choice as a beginning of every setting, the attribute was included. If I inherited exactly the same attributes as before, I would naturally be inclined as a Swordsman. But for now, I had to confirm my enhancements.

Without a hint of hesitation, I spoke.

“Yes. Calling recorded data of Player Kim Su-Hyun. 27%, 56%, 87%, 100%. Complete. Load has been successfully compiled. ”

The moment Seraph finished, I could feel energy well up inside me. With it, I could feel a heavier current encroach the surface of my skin. While I had the body of 23-year old who was freshly discharged from the army, it could not compare to the physique I attained as a Sword Master.

BOOM!

As I spread out my right arm, a rough striking sound could be heard. Filled with satisfaction I checked my Player Status.

“.....”

My attributes were enhanced, but excluding that, everything had been reset to their initial state. While it was a pity that I lost my title of Zenith and my achievements, it was necessary so I nodded to continue.

“Player Status load confirmed. Now I need to use the attribute enhancement privilege?”

“Yes. Of course. Just in case, I advise caution. Of the 6 attributes,

only 4 will be greatly enhanced. The percentage and the attributes that will be augmented is all random, but to a certain point, it follows the Player's latent growth. By all means please consider this point."

"That much, I already know."

To put it simply, the higher the attribute, the lower it will be augmented. In reverse, the lower the attribute is, the higher it will be enhanced. Compared to latent growth, I didn't know how much the other minor difference between individuals affected the results, but this was a rule that was applied to everyone equally. Excluding fate, elixir, and rewards from achievement, there was a limitation in increasing the attributes through simple training.

Strength, Vitality, Magic Power. I was praying in my heart for these 3 attributes to be enhanced.

For me, Magic Power was the most important. Then it was Vitality and Strength; Resistance and Agility were equally comparable. Luck was the last on my list. Of course, if only one value was high and every other value was ridiculously low, it would be a problematic foundation. But, one figure that can bring up and support the rest the most efficiently was the Magic Power attribute.

"Then I shall commence immediately."

'Luck can be forgotten. Please Strength, Vitality, Magic Power. If all else fails, then at least Vitality and Magic Power.....!'

I am not sure if my fervent plea was heard, but in no time the privilege seemed to have been bestowed. In the time it took Seraph to stir her finger once, streams of messages popped in the air in front of me, occupying my field of vision.

---

Notes:

연한 쌍꺼풀이 진 눈 안으로 옥빛 눈동자가반짝였다. - Her turquoise pupils inside her light double eyelids gleamed.

쌍꺼풀 - double eyelids probably does not conjure up any images or any context for most readers who are not Asian. This article will give you a background context.

## Episode 4 - I Use My Privileges (1)

---

An unknown energy is making your Strength stronger. Strength has increased slightly.

An unknown energy is making your Agility stronger. Agility has increased slightly.

Your inner Magic Power is expanding like an explosion! You are almost at the limit of control! Magic Power has increased greatly!

Lady Luck smiles on you! She has her sight on you! Luck has increased greatly!

Seeing the messages, I couldn't hope for Strength and Agility to increase significantly. There was not much I could do. Granted, Strength was Strength, but 96 Agility point in Hall Plain was a high figure that could be counted on one hand. Still, my expectation for Magic Power and Luck grew greatly. Though it sounded like an ordinary event message, there was a special flavour text.

‘It's really been a long time since I felt this excited. It's unfortunate my Vitality didn't increase but...’

Even then, he had never expected to be granted these privileges in the first place. Just this much was already extraordinary. Willing my thumping heart to relax, I called up the Player Status Window.

< Player Status >

Name: Kim Su-Hyun (0 Years)

---

Class: -

Affiliated Nation: -

Affiliated Clan: -

Title: Principal who is required to validate his entitlement, a Spare Player

Nationality: South Korean

Gender: Male (23 yrs.old)

Height: 181.5cm.

Weight: 75.5kg

Alignment: Lawful · Chaos

(Before Change)

[Strength 86] [Resistance 92] [Agility 96] [Vitality 78] [Magic Power 48] [Luck 36]

---

(After Change)

[Strength 94] [Resistance 92] [Agility 98] [Vitality 78] [Magic Power 90] [Luck 88]

< Achievements (0) >

< Special Ability (0/1) >

< Latent Ability (0/4) >

‘Strength increased by 8, Agility by 2 points, Magic Power by 42 points, Luck by 52 points. 108 point increase in total.’

Good. This was really good. The Attributes with miserable figures transformed into eye-poppingly high number after the messages.

Although this was something I should be happy about, the Vitality was a huge detraction to my eyes. As I constantly compared it to the other Attributes, my heart was speared with regrets.

‘Why did Luck increase rather than Vitality....’

Compared to the other Attributes, Vitality was so important that it could be called the ‘pillar’ or the ‘root.’ Using an analogy of a car, if the Magic Power was the car engine, the Vitality would be the car frame. I had current 78 points in Vitality, quite a middling value.

‘I should be able to draw out the output one way or another but.... sigh.’

Mankind’s greed seemed endless. Even though my Attributes were so much better than before, my regret did not disappear.

My mind meandered, but for now, I decided to leave my discontent aside and continue. There was still more privileges to

accept. I needed to refrain from leisurely killing time.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. Will you move on to the next privilege?”

“Hmm. Then shall we..... No, wait a moment.”

The moment I was about to nod mechanically, I reflexively shook my head in a no. As Attributes was something out of my hand, I went into it immediately. But that was not the case with the others. From now on, I could select my own path and choices. I needed to be cautious and focused on every single decision.

“Seraph. Can you tell me how much time is left till the Rite of Passage.”

“1 hour, 42 minutes and 23 seconds.”

“Wait, wait, give me a moment to think. For 30 minutes.... No, 10 minutes.”

“By the will of the Player.”

I immediately closed my eyes and went deep into my thoughts.

In Hall Plain, I was strong. I was strong to a certain extent, seeing I was able to grasp the Zero Code with my own hand. While I had the qualification to be called strong, I knew that I could never claim to be the ‘best’ or the ‘strongest.’ I was so hopelessly far from

achieving such title. My low Magic Power was always a shackle that dragged me down.

Although my Magic Power problem was solved for now, if looked at another way, I might have already reached its ceiling. Though thinking about it, it wouldn't be wrong to say my physique had hit its limits as well. Outward it showed that I was year 0 but in reality, I had loaded up 10 years worth of growth. There were ways to increase Attributes through rewards, equipment and elixirs, but the most common, popular and difficult to increase consistently was through 'training.'

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying it's all bad. Depending on the individual, I saw that on average most Players reached 70-80 point range through training alone before the growth stopped. If you take that into consideration, my Attributes was quite dazzling.

'To a point, this was also quite ordinary.'

There were always special cases that jumped beyond prediction. Some whose attribute started off at 70 points and above. Rather, I should change my thinking to expect such situations. The miracles and mishaps I experienced in my first time around, there was no guarantee that it would happen again. For my desires, I needed the strength to make it happen.

I opened my eyes. Seraph was still sitting on top of the altar, waiting for my command. Seeing her, I quietly opened my mouth.

"Seraph, for my next privilege I would like to request for the

## Class Selection.”

“Yes. Player Kim Su-Hyun’s request has been received. The principal is granted the priority access of Class selection before Rite of Passage and admission into Hall Plain. In addition, for one time only, the Class wrapped in secrets will be revealed to you.”

Class selection was part of the process that validated entitlement through the Player Setting. More precisely, after surviving the Rite of Passage and before entering Hall Plain, there is a process a person had to pass through in the Room of Summoning. I had skipped through all of it and had access to Player Setting right from the start.

I had the mind to chose a Swordsman related Class this time around as well. My Magic Power had increased to an extent that other Class path had opened up, but I had already thought of this already. I just had a feeling that Swordsman would be the best selection, as I had already walked this path before. A shortcut was right in front of me, there just no need to break new grounds.

A chart stuffed with information floated up in the air. Without even looking, I turned off the Rare chart. With only the Secret chart left, I began to look through it carefully.

### Job List (Secret)

[War Mage]

[Field Maestro]

[Requiem Assassin]

[Soul Commander]

[Jewel Mage]

[Copy Archmage]

[Death Knight]

[Brilliance Priest]

[.....]

‘Nope.... Not this.... Hmm.... I’m sure that guy definitely had this Class....’

Was there this many Secret Class? Momentarily, I lost the ability to speak as I saw more Secret Class than I thought possible. Moaning and groaning about this would get me nowhere, and at this rate, this would eat up all my time. So I turned to Seraph for help.

“Seraph. Among the Secret, is it possible to show me the Swordman related Class only?”

“That is easily accomplished. Are you perhaps of the thought to select a Swordman related Secret Class?”

“And if so?”

“I recommend it. It’s an excellent choice. Please wait a moment. I shall sort out the list immediately.”

The reason I was so hung up on Class was that the Special and Latent Ability was directly connected to it. Through Attributes, the

Class was decided. Through the Class, Special and Latent Abilities were decided. This was the order I had set on. With the ‘Unique Ability’ in mind, I had to prepare the best I could for the two Latent Abilities that would be chosen randomly.

“Sorting has been complete. I shall bring up the chart now.”

“Hmm.”

I once again looked meticulously through the Class that Seraph filtered for me. The one I wanted was a Class that could readily face against a Mage. In my first run through, with my low Magic Power and Luck, I had trouble every time I fought against Mage. Even as I think about it now, goosebumps arose and my teeth began to chatter.

‘Found it.’

As I reached the halfway mark on the list, I finally found the Class I wanted.

Job List (Secret)

[Sword Specialist]

[Spell Sniper]

[.....]

Secret Class from each Class category possessed a peculiar ‘power.’ The above two Class appeared in my first run, and their

might rang throughout the surroundings.

The power of the Sword Speciality was granting an advantage to every action related to the sword and had the ability to cut through anything that existed in the world. The power of the Spell Sniper was a fixed probability in completely resisting all Magic.

To expand on the Spell Sniper a bit more, any spell that was cast with Magic Power below 75 point was completely resisted. Below 85 points, 80% of the damage was reduced and below 90 points, it granted 50% damage reduction.

If I didn't think through and went straight to Class selection privilege, I would have chosen the Spell Sniper without thinking twice. If I could overlap one of the Latent Ability, Magic Resistance, with its power, then excluding the Grand Mages that breached the upper limits of Magic, the ordinary Mages could be mow downed like simple dummies.

But I had thought it out before my selection, and my mind was sharply inclined to the Sword Specialist. The power to cut anything that existed in this world, it was a power with such fatal attraction I would dare not give it up. I recalled the Player who was active as a Sword Specialist. His might was nothing to scoff at. He cut, slashed and cancel numerous Magic. Like the leaves blown off by the Autumn wind, countless Mages that faced him were swept away.

Spell Sniper was good, but Sword Specialist was formidable.

“.....”

After a moment of deliberation, I was set on selecting Sword Specialist. Looking at it, it was no different than choosing an adventure. As if I was under some kind of spell, I opened my mouth and spoke with a light voice.

“I will go with Sword Specialist.”

“Sword Specialist? While not bad, the Spell Sniper is considerably good Job. Considering Player Kim Su-Hyun’s current Magic Power, only rare few Mages will be able to harm you.”

“Well, you are right.”

“Then why....”

“But if you think in reverse, it means I am already quite resistant isn’t it?”

“.....”

I could see Seraph was still unsatisfied. My heart shook, but I stood firm and spoke strongly.

“I will give you an example so think carefully. There is a guaranteed fixed success rate for a targeting system, and a non-targeting system with directional control. Electronics has a certain

success rate, but also a clear limitation. But the latter relies purely on my skill and the success rate depends on it. Did you get what I said?”

“I have understood the point.”

“Then I shall go with Sword Specialist.”

“By the will of the Player.”

Seraph looked like she was thinking for bit, and then she nodded once right away. Immediately a message popped up telling me that information has been updated.

Congratulations. You have attained the Secret Class, [Sword Specialist]. Player data has been updated.

Seeing the message, I felt strangely relieved. I am not sure if it was because I passed my first challenge with little difficulty, but I was noticeably more relaxed. But it was still too early to relieved. Steeling myself, I prepared for my next privilege. Seeing that the next privilege was out of my hands, tension began to boil in me once again.

3. You are granted the privileges concerning Special Ability and Latent Ability. Ordinarily, Players are allowed 1 slot for Special Ability and 4 slots for Latent Ability. Player Kim Su-Hyun’s Latent Ability slot will be expanded by 1. Including this, the Hidden Ability, Special Ability and Latent Ability slots will be freed up,

with the selection choice given to the Player.

With a different process, the 'Unique Ability' slot can be opened. The Unique Ability is applicable above the Special Ability. If you abandon the Unique Ability, 1 Special Ability slot and 5 Latent Ability slot will be freed up for the Player's desired selection. (At this point, the expanded slot will be automatically applied to the Latent Ability)

I began to harp on the information that was stored in my brain.

Special and Latent Abilities traits developed one by one depending on a person's inclination. Just the chance to decide on the Ability right from the start was a huge benefit. This just showed how significantly different my starting line was compared to other. But this also meant I had to be extremely careful with my choices.

To reiterate, Special and Latent Ability was the most important aspect that influenced the efficiency of the character. Just earning a trait that was well suited for the person's Class made the Player strong. But when the reverse happened, the Class loses the ability to be that much more efficient. For one to be strong, all the Attributes, Class, Ability had to be in harmony.

"Seraph, I would like my next privilege to grant me Abilities."

"Yes. Then I shall ask whether you want to activate the Unique Ability slot. The difference is...."

“I already know. I am going to go with activating the Unique Ability.”

“Understood. An Ability slot will be consumed momentarily. Also, from the remaining four slot, two will be chosen at random.”

I had faith. Like comparing how the Player’s growth affected how Attributes were enhanced, Abilities developed with a similar rule set. To put it simply, it was most likely that the result would be influenced by the physique I achieved as a Sword Master. My thinking was impeccable, the chance of getting two Abilities from my first run was extremely high.

As I waited by flicking a mental abacus, Seraph gave me a signal, it seems the preparations were complete.

“Unique Ability, Special Ability, Latent Ability list has been called. Will you choose to select first, or activate the two Latent slots?”

I was not without a tinge of anxiety. But getting hit by a stick first was better. I decided to spin for the two Latent Abilities first.

“Activate the two Latent Ability Slot first.”

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Notes:

I am sure you noticed by now that plot moves very slowly. That’s

because there are 1068 chapters in this story. Including this and until EP.7, the story still deals with privilege selection.

RAW Language Usage.

All the Class have Korean and English name given by the author. For example:

(Sword Specialist) 검술 전문가 and 소드 스페셜리스트. The first one is a direct translation and second one is phonetic.

직업 and 클래스: Job and Class seemed to be used interchangeably by the author.

## Episode 5 - I Use My Privileges (2)

---

Strength in Hall Plain, or to be more precise, the ‘Player Information’ was what this world saw as top priority. It compiled all the Player’s Year(s), Alignment, Attribute, and Ability in one place, and the world judged you on that.

I’m not sure if this made everyone shrewder. I am not even sure I would receive all my privileges and in the short time I have, it was impossible to set up the perfect setting. But, I had something no one did, I had 10 years of experience.

I want to live. And if I wanted to live, I needed strength. The heart that desired to live, was followed by a yearning for strength. What Ability I should raise, what I must do to become strong. I pondered, agonised and researched. Getting 48 point raise in my Magic Power and rising to the level of Master was not earned by sheer luck alone.

I could have never imagined the knowledge I harboured for so long to be so suitable for the privileges granted to me.

The randomly selected Latent Abilities was within the bound of my prediction. As I read the name of the Abilities that filled the empty slots, I was slightly relieved. The only thing left now to fill was the 1 Unique Ability slot, 1 Special Ability slot, and 2 Latent Ability slot.

Only after repeating the painstaking labour of selecting the Unique, Special, and Latent Ability could I for the first time give

out a sigh of relief

“Whew. I am finished.”

“.....”

Then, I felt a subtle gaze on me. However, there were only two people in the Room of Summoning. There was no need to see who was staring at me right now.

Seraph’s final farewell was tender and affectionate. But 10 years of sediments that built up didn’t just wash away. Moreover, as I now know knew about the inside story, I was far from being able to return the affection.

I purposefully avoided looking in Seraph’s direction. For a while, my back was turned and I tried not to pay attention, but that too was a phase. In the end, I couldn’t overcome that uncomfortable gaze and so I asked.

“What are you looking at.”

My voice was filled to the brim with bluntness, but her eyes became more courteous. Briefly exchanging looks, she spoke slightly above tone.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun’s Attributes. And the Unique, Special and Latent Abilities selected through the use of privilege. I have taken these two aspects and synthesised it with the Sword Specialist

settings. I inferred one thing.”

“Says who?”

“Says the Assistant.”

Seeing Seraph immediately hitting back, it kind of felt absurd. Did the Angel just make a joke? Or was she being serious? Or half-half? I didn’t know, but in my bewilderment, I gave a nod.

“Sure. So what did you find?”

“I perceived that you have a deep knowledge pool concerning Attributes and Abilities. It’s as if you are a Player who have experienced Hall Plain for some time.”

“Hahaha. That’s absurd.”

I suddenly felt a serious throb in my heart. But I didn’t show it and as I calmly asked again, Seraph shook her head.

“No, it is nothing.”

“I admit, I have a unique personality.”

“It is not your behaviour I am referring to. Player Kim Su-Hyun’s effective selection through the use of privilege is higher than what

we Angels predicted. Such selection is improbable without personally experiencing Hall Plain.”

“Just a moment. Yay or Nay on Navigation?”

“Nay. Let me reiterate, you have no need to worry concerning privileges. Angels are fundamentally different to Humans. What we say does not mean anything else. ‘What,’ ‘So.’ I roughly understand that Player Kim Su-Hyun is trying to arouse provocation. That is all.”

I could detect an honest admiration in Seraph’s tone. Her words were quite profound. My paining heart could not be puffed up about it. Even if I honestly did my research, among the Players with the prominently renowned title, I based all of this on one Player that possess the Class.

It was the price that came with fame, I remembered him all the more clearly as we shared the same name. Sword Specialist Jin Su Hyun. At the time, this Secret Class was an absolute nightmare for the Mages and was famous for its preeminent power in the Great Mage War.

Jin Su Hyun was a Player that entered Hall Plain later than me. If we compared, there would probably be about 1-year difference. But. through the very definition of effort, he made that one year difference negligible. Through the very definition of talent, he overtook me. When I think about my own efforts, that feeling of loss still made my heart feel unpleasant.

Still, coming back to the main topic, trying to obtain Jin Su Hyun's information right now is near impossible. In the first place, we were never close and he wasn't a lunatic who would go around tell other Player's his info. Even if I inherit most of the essential key elements, in the whole context of things, it would only be about 20%. The remaining 80% I had to make my own interpretation, meaning the skeleton was there, I now had to add the flesh. As I said before, I had to put faith in my 10 years of experience and effort.

“Anyway, stop looking at me like that!”

Openly showing my discomfort, Seraph quietly closed her mouth.

‘Anyways, it will be me who's going to take the Sword Specialist.’

It was not like I did not have a shred of remorse, so I sent up a prayer to Jin Su Hyun. ‘Someone of your calibre can succeed with any Class other than Sword Specialist, so don't worry much.’ Sending off my none-prayer like prayer, I immediately spun my head to the next privilege.

The fourth privilege.

4. For 1 time only, you will be able to receive a body modification procedure.

Though it says body modification procedure, there was nothing

special about it. Replacing a body part with a mechanical one or becoming a scientific existence, I had seen occasions of people deliberately replacing their body parts. But most of the times, the body modification procedure only happened in unavoidable situations when people completely lost their limbs. Being healthy with all my limbs intact, I did not want to give up any parts of my body. I could become strong without resorting to this method.

There was, however, one thing I had in mind and that was the tattoo procedure. The success of this procedure was an essential part of my plan. If this didn't exist, the success rate of my plan would not even reach 30%. The item I was about to request through my 5th privilege was that powerful and dangerous.

With the 3rd privilege having taken some time, I decided to immediately request for the tattoo procedure.

“Hmm, let me see. Rather than some grand modifications, I think I will go for something simple like a tattoo.”

“That is possible. I shall call up the tattoo chart. Please wait a moment.”

“Ah, don't worry about it. I already know what it's called. I want the tattoo, 'Ancient Miko's Seal.'”

“Where would you like to etch the tattoo?”

Looking unconcerned, I raise my right hand to my face. When I

saw Seraph following my right hand, I moved the hand and pointed it to my left chest.

“The heart.”

“Did you say the heart....?”

“So?”

“.....”

Silence reigned on Seraph's face. Not a word was spoken. But I was sure that within her, she was calculating at a speed I couldn't fathom. I felt bad seeing her trying so hard to figure out my objectives, but there was no way in hell I was about to her yet.

Most of the times, the normal tattoos were etched on top of the skin. However using Ancient Magic, the Magic Engraving, to operate on the heart seem undesirable.

The central nerve of Magic that Players used was controlled by the heart and its pathway. Tattoo that, directly and indirectly, affected Magic reaction was engraved on the heart. The possibility of unknown complications erupting was ever present with this procedure.

However, 'Ancient Miko' tattoo was different.

If I mentioned any other ordinary tattoos, I would still be engaged in verbal sparring with Seraph. If I was applying normal tattoos that dealt with Mana Amplification or Amount, the amount of complications that could arise was countless.

The 'Ancient Miko's Seal' ran contrary to the normal tattoos, in that it had a total of 2 abilities. 1st, when there was a heavy influx of Magic Power it stabilised it. 2nd, it assisted in the effective flow of Magic Power.

I am sure Seraph was agonising as much as there is positive function of the 'Ancient Miko's Seal,' Still, I was slightly nervous as I stared at her lips. This procedure was the final key to turning my likely to fail plan into a success. After a while, Seraph's fair lips gradually opened.

"Yes."

Bingo.

"I shall accept Player Kim Su-Hyun's request. It is predicted that exactly 5 minutes and 7 seconds will be consumed. I shall begin the procedure immediately."

"Okay."

In that moment the air in front of me was filled with Ancient Characters that emitted a bright blue light. They drew into an oval and began to circle my body. With the Characters surrounding me, I

felt I was hallucinating as I heard the solemn voice of the Mikos everywhere.

After 5 minutes. One by one the Ancient Characters that were gently circling me were seeping into where my heart.

Even though it was my heart, I did not feel any pain. Rather, each time a Character entered me, I felt a small gush of energy flow in me. With the last line of the Characters entering me, I could tie up the procedure.

I not sure if anything changed as I couldn't feel any sensations. But this was easily rectified by using Magic Power, so I immediately set out to check it.

‘Oho.’

I thought I would have a hard time trying to apply my explosively increased Magic Power, but I didn't feel any burden. My Magic Power seemed to be leisurely following my pathways. The procedure was a success. At this unexpected and satisfying capability, I felt immediate gratification.

“It's okay. Seraph? Tell me how much time is left.”

“Time left to reach the Rite of Passage from now is 48 minutes and 39 seconds.”

48 minutes and 39 seconds. I licked my lips. Seeing Seraph had

nothing to add, she must have thought there was plenty of time left. But to my estimation, time was tight. The 5th privilege was going to be an adventure in gambling. The danger was so great, that I could not even guarantee my own life. But when I weigh the necessity, it was unavoidable. Grabbing my shaking heart, I pulled up the 5th privilege.

5. Player Kim Su-Hyun shall be permitted to choose one equipment with no type restriction. EX ranked equipment cannot be selected.

Looking at it in one way, this was a privilege with quite an extensive selection. Sword, shield, elixir, accessories.... However, if I choose such mundane items, receiving the ‘Ancient Miko’s Seal’ tattoo becomes meaningless. That was how much I needed this 5th privilege.

“Hwajung, Fire of Hwajung sound good. So I will have that as my 5th privilege.”

“Acknowledging Player Kim Su-Hyun’s request....?”

She ended on a strange note. As her toned changed to a question at the end, there was a slight frown on her brows.

‘Did I get caught?’

There was a strong possibility of her figuring out my request. However, it seems that my request had gone through as a small

marble was clutched in Seraph's right hand, emitting a blood red light.

“.....”

“.....”

We did not speak at all. But one look into Seraph's eye said it all. She had no plans to give me the marble. It seems that I guessed right as Seraph as made a strict face and was shooting me with a reprimanding eye. Not to be outdone, I also hardened my eyes and look straight at her.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun”

“Tanay.”

“Of course. But this is a different issue. No matter the use of Tanay, I cannot comply when it could cause harm to the Player.”

“I am not interested in your meddling with your pretentious advice. Stop with the silly talk and give it here. I need the Fire of Hwajung. What kind of crazy do you think I was when I left all the good procedures to take on the Ancient Miko's Seal?”

That's why I hated Seraph, she always fought before giving in. There were so many times when we tied up our work with our emotions in tatters. Remembering those occasions, like clockwork, my ruthless words filled up to my throat. But that deep and earnest

eyes before our parting brushed past my mind. I bit on my lips and turn my ears to her. For now, I was going to hear her out.

“I respect your creativity. For a human to give rise to such thinking, it is truly remarkable. But it is just that.”

“.....”

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. I am curious on how much you know about the Fire of Hwajung.”

“.... only that it can burn everything?”

“It is not dissimilar. The other name for the Fire of Hwajung is Eternally Blazing Inferno. The fire known through every household for its destructive power is the Hellfire. The concentration of pure fire, the Hwajung can be compared as it's equal and contains such dangerous power within. Literally, this fire is meant for destruction.”

“I know. I know everything so just give it here.”

“Resistance value 92. Magic Power value 90. Prediction on the rate of success, 21%. Adding the ‘Ancient Miko’s Seal’ into the calculation, the rate of success is expected to be 42%. In reverse, this is above the halfway mark with 58% chance of failure.”

Seraph was desperate in her attempt to convince me otherwise. Still, no matter how much she tried, the privileges still ranked as

Tanay. I wasn't sure if she could act on her own advice, but my decision could not be blocked. So, I stretched out my right hand and requested for the Hwajung in a grand manner.

“Then I just need to succeed, don't I?”

Even if I said it, the words were there to bring comfort to my heart. Seraph's dress is probably all upside down by now. Having talked so much now, I don't think she would swallow any more rubbish from me. Seraph was hanging by the thread with her plea.

“There is nothing to speak in case of failure, but success will cause undue complications. Fail, you will lose everything and become a crippled. Succeed, there will be an unpredictable drawback.”

“I am sure I read that I could take any equipment that wasn't EX rank. Is Hwajung EX rank?”

“Original the Fire of Hwajung was EX rank. As long as the equipment exists within Hall Plain, it can never make an appearance. Merely attempting to grasp it is a distant dream, but through the work of the Balance, it was granted an S ranked but the danger is ever prese....”

This path had no end. I felt a bone weary tiredness settling in. Lifting up my hand, I stopped her. Any other day I would have listened to her till the end, but the remaining time made it all the more urgent. Or, I had a sudden mental jolt, could it be Seraph was trying to waste time until I was dragged off to the Rite of Passage?

“I don’t want to lock head with this anymore.”

“This is difficult to attempt with Resistance and Magic Power Attribute over 90, but with Vitality at 78, it is impossible. I understand your confidence but please look at the reality of the situation.”

Of course, I knew the worries that permeated Seraph. Her worries were filled with warmth that any ordinary person would have caved in a little at her earnest plea. But I could not do so. If I could compromise on anything else I would have, but this was something I have long awaited for. If I gave up on Hwajung like this....

“The recovery time isn’t easy to deal with. If we dawdle any longer by the time we enter the Rite of Passage we are going to be half corpses.”

“Player Kim Su-Hyun.”

“I am not going to speak anymore. The Fire of Hwajung, I am completely certain of my request.”

In the end, I spoke with a cold, thunderous voice. I am not sure if she picked up on the seriousness in the air or that she couldn’t refuse against Tanay, but Seraph slowly manoeuvred her fingers. Her face was still filled with dissent, but after a while, she pushed the Hwajang in my direction. It wasn’t a gentle push.

“I assure you, even if you succeed, a day will come that you will surely regret this action.”

“Okay....”

Gently floating.

The Fire of Hwajang. A concentration of pure fire. An Eternally Blazing Inferno.

There was no need for preparation. For a long time I was set on this path, and taking into consideration the aftermath of the storm, there was not much time left.

The Hwajung drew a very thin crimson trajectory toward my mouth and flew straight into it.

Gulp.

I had finally obtained the Hwajung. For the first time, Hwajung came into my arms. Relief and joy rushed in me and I hurriedly contemplated what's inside me.

Thuck.

Moving my larynx with a gulp, I felt a round marble rolling down my oesophagus.

It was only now that my true ordeal started.

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Notes:

## Changes

Privilege 4 has been redefined. Something to note: 신체 개조 시술을 받을 수 있습니다.

“you will be able to receive a body modification procedure.”

More commonly used word is 수술 but 시술 has been used and there is a difference.

시술 is a short procedure vs 수술 which is a surgery with the use of anaesthetics.

## Dictions

고대 무녀의 각인 - Ancient Miko's Seal

I know Miko is Japanese but 무녀 seems to most commonly refer to women who receives Shinto gods.

화정 - Hwajung (火正) Hmm... let's just leave it at that, there is enough hint here already.

## Episode 6 - I Use My Privileges (3)

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Hot. Hwajung that is going down my oesophagus is hot. Rolling down through my body, I felt the Hwajung responding for the first time when it touches my slow flowing Magic Power.

Whoosh! Whroosh!

The reaction transformed into a fierce kindle, and with an unpredictable momentum, a fire began. The potential flame(炎) locked in the marble could be felt by its distinct smell, a telling indication of Hwajung's strength - pure and destructive.

BOOM...!

It was fortunate that the first feedback was faint. Nevertheless, on various point on my body bubbled and fire swirled and vomited out. I could not handle the sudden bursts on my body as fire leaked out. Every time I wiggled, sparks flickered to my surroundings and my body spasmed intermittently.

I think Seraph saw my sorry shape, as I heard a faint spell being chanted. I did not know where she was but with great difficulty, waved my hand at her. Do not interfere.

Seraph was completely right. With my abilities, trying to forcefully Hwajung's power was but a distant dream. There was some chance of success through the use of the 'Ancient Miko' tattoo. But I had no plans to use the tattoo's strength yet. Nay, it was more accurate to say I had absolutely no plan in the first place

to curb Hwajung. Rather, the ‘Ancient Miko’ tattoo would be used to offer a place of refuge for my soon to be companion, Hwajung.

What I desired was not oppression or control. Could any human possibly take in a power equivalent to the Hellfire? However, if the scenario changed to simply borrowing its power, the situation completely changed.

Opening one of my eyes, I could see a faint outline of Seraph. She was rolling on her feet. Seeing an Angel doing so was quite a unique sight, but I immediately focused my gaze on her face. Till now, it was just a precursor to the main event, which was about to start very soon. I knew it so very well.

It was more complicated than comparing the burst caused by Hwajung to an ordinary explosion. It was not a physical explosion but an explosion of pure energy. An incomparable accompaniment of energy and agony. And then, Hwajung started up in earnest for the first time.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

“G, Gah.”

Without me knowing, consecutive explosions caused my eyes to roll back. The pain from the explosions was unimaginable. In my 10 years in Hall Plain, I experienced so many injuries and pain, but those were all love taps to what I was feeling now. I shuddered at the greater intensity of pain that was coming, but that made me clench my teeth all the harder.

Inside, I was repeating it endlessly. I am Player Kim Su-Hyun who saw the end of Hall Plain. In all that time, my patience was endlessly and I persevered eternally. In that 10 years of time, I accomplished something no one managed, I held the Zero Code in my own hands. I did not earn that pride through simple fun and games.

I am not sure if it was the sound of the explosion or Seraph's voice, as the surrounding was in an uproar. Although, I guess it didn't really matter as I couldn't hear properly anyways. With every passing second, the energy from Hwajung was increasing steadily. And when I felt it was about to erupt once more, I pulled every fibre of my being in awakening my Magic Power to stimulate Hwajung's energy.

As I applied the vast 90 point of Magic Power, the energy that Hwajung was about to let off tapered off for a moment. It was no more than a mere moment, but I could give off a weak smile. My Magic Power mixed with Hwajung's energy without any difficulty.

The concentration of pure fire. An eternally blazing fire. The Hwajung had a will of its own. Containing a 'self' it was similar but also different to an Ego equipment that chose its own master. The difference was the 'will.' By its will, it could exert or refuse to activate its power. It did not have an ego but the emotion was alive. Joining my Magic Power with Hwajung, I was trying to reach a mutual consensus.

The emotion I felt from Hwajung was sheer astonishment. Most of the times, if anything was trying to subvert their insides, trying

to control the energy was the normal thing to do. But on the contrary, I was helping it along. I had extended my hand to it. 'I am not trying to force you to kneel, but an equal partnership where power is borrowed.' I shouted in my heart with all my honest emotions.

'I absolutely need you. Go ahead and flip my heart upside down. Search out if I am a fit partner who can borrow your power, make your own decision and show me your judgement.'

In a moment of but just one breath, hot air exhaled through my nostrils and fire streamed out of my nose.

'Good. I understand.'

It was close, but I managed to receive Hwajung's approval.

I braced myself. Hwajung was fretting to play, and I guided it to space where it could. The first target was my right and left arms. As fast as it could, I felt it split its energy and send a titanic amount toward both directions. Guiding it to the passage through my vessels and blood, I felt the energy rushing down like a wave. Indiscernible, Hwajung reaches the tips of my fingers in an instant and occupied even the microscopic acupoint.

Burgle! Burgle!

Tuk! Tuk! Tuk! Tuk!

I felt a strange feeling of bubbles bursting in the blood of my body, it felt good and painful at the same time. A refreshing sound of my blocked vessels being unclogged. Even if it was being forcefully opened, the effect was astounding. What the masters of the past found difficult, Hwajung had punctured through right to the microscopic acupoint located at the tip of my finger.

Simultaneously on both my arms, a yellowish ooze and blackish fluid boiled to the surface of the skin. Unable to withstand the heat, it evaporated into the air. The waste and impurities that were hidden deep within my body had impeded Hwajung's path and was summarily struck. Usually, this would be a cause for celebration but unfortunately, I had no reason to right now.

I felt dizzy even though I had simply guided it through my arms. I gently coax the energy to return to my centre. Fortunately, Hwajung seems done with the part it seized, as it docile followed my will. As the energy that filled both my arms streamed out, my arms hang uselessly. That huge shock had literally made me lose sensation on my arms.

I was worried that at this rate I might lose my arms but I had no desire to undo what happened. Hwajung pestered petulantly at me to quickly take it to different areas, so I hurriedly guided it to the passage leading to my legs. It stealthily jostling my back as it came nearer, and as if it waited for an eternity, it rushed down my legs like a fierce wave.

Burgle! Burgle!

Tuk! Tuk! Tuk! Tuk!

The process was no different than what happened to both my arms. The result was the same. As the subjugating energy left, my legs couldn't bear it and again, I lost sensation on another body part. I dropped to the ground flabbily. My current Resistance, Vitality and Magic Power at best could only seem to keep my body from breaking down and keep it in one shape.

Without giving a damn, explosions went off in my stretched out body as Hwajung played energetically like a fish that entered water for the very first time. Literally, I was but a moment away from going crazy. I wanted to faint as pain hammered every part of my body, but my superhuman patience weakly held my mind together.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Every time I heard an explosion, a jolt went through my heart and my blood became hot. 'Isn't there any more place to play?' Hwajung called out its intention. I braced myself and asked it to gather more energy first. I would lead it to my last barrier, my head.

With it near my head, I felt fear enter me for the first time. This was uncontrollable fear. Whether it pierced through my head or not, I was at the point I didn't even want to imagine the pain I would experience. Then.

'If I don't want to, maybe I should end it here? Do I even have to raise it to my head? Isn't this enough?'

I thought the voice whispering in my ear resembled closely with Hwajung's gentle voice. I was about to nod but I immediately shook no. My rationality told me to stop, but my instinct had already finish guiding the energy to my head.

‘Stupid. Don’t you know you could die?’

“Just this much....”

The preparation was over.

Don’t do it. Don’t do it. Don’t do it.

My mind told me to stop, but my body didn’t care as it remained faithful to my instincts. I screamed out as I sent off Hwajung to the passage leading to my head.

“Don’t underestimate me!”

Without me knowing, I spat out those words but my will was conveyed. The energy in my centre began to swirl into life. The energy built up one after another, stopping right below the abdomen.

Pulling every strength since I was born, I blazed up the energy. It left a trail of fierce bursts as Hwajung entered my throat in an instant.

“Cough!”

PUHWA!

Nose, mouth, ears, eyes. Every hole in my body was leaking dark crimson blood. All my sensations were ringing an alarm bell. This was the feeling of death.

Whoosh! Whroosh!

Hwajung’s energy flared it’s irritation at an obstruction in my throat if an explosion burst here, only a gruesome end awaited me. Vertigo swept through my body and my mind felt like it jumped off a cliff.

I could feel this was the end. I pulled the energy that rotated in a confused vortex in my throat back down to my abdomen. I was extremely fortunate the energy followed my will and moved down.

‘No matter what, it have to pierce through.’

One.... Two.... Three.... The energy whirled around for a total of ten times as it was putting its finishing touches. Thinking this would be my last, I rushed the energy toward my head once more. I couldn’t even care about the pain that would visit me soon.

BOOM!

The unreserved shock shook my whole body. The throat was refreshingly unclogged and a path to my head was established. Like before, Hwajung's energy covered the whole of my head.

\*\*\*\*\*

I couldn't see. Thankfully, that was it. My eyes turned on and off for a moment, turning the world into a field of white. Everything else, well, I couldn't feel anything at all. It was like my memory was cut out in the middle and attached to the next piece.

Whoosh! Whroosh! Whoosh! Whroosh!

I could barely perceive the situation. It felt like Hwajung was asking me why I resisted in the first place as it made it's temper known by turning my head upside down non-stop. I felt my brain literally melting.

Pain? Truthfully, when the energy first pierced through me, there was a refreshing feeling. But as my vision slowly returned and the sensation in my body recovered, I could finally feel it. A pain I never wanted to experience in ever again.

‘Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!’ ’

If I could have screamed, I would have screamed at the top of my lungs. The pain had long passed what ordinary humans could endure, a different dimensional pain surrounded me. Is this how it feels like if one dunks their head in a blasting furnace? Or dunking

oneself in oil and throwing themselves into a pit of fire? No matter how many adversities and hardship I suffered through, in this instant, I earnestly desired death.

A huge explosion that could be seen outside my body, racked through my entire being. The sum of all explosions detonated. Starting from my head, the eternally blazing inferno that is Hwajung claimed ownership as bit by bit it seized my body. Every cell in my body that Hwajung's energy touched began to sizzle, pain no longer racked through me, rather warmth seeped through.

Some time passed like that, and my vision return, cloudy as it may. I still couldn't move my body. Lifting my eyelids that weighed like a ton, I saw a white-faced Seraph who was looking at me vacantly.

‘Am I still alive....?’

If I had to go through such excruciating pain once more, I'd rather die.

The final part was relatively easy compared to opening my head. I slowly gathered all the energy Hwajung spread through my body and gently pulled it to my heart. I don't know if it like me or not, but Hwajung obediently followed my will and moved.

It was only now that I activated the magic held within the ‘Ancient Miko's Seal’ tattoo. Hwajung seemed satisfied with running amok earlier that it obediently entered my heart. I felt it neatly settling in.

“Su Hyun! Su Hyun!”

I fainted right then and there. I did not even have a moment to feel relieved.

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Notes:

English is limited in describing some words.

지옥의 겁화 or Hellfire(헬파이어) doesn't really do these word justice. 지옥 - is Hell. Meaning behind 겁화 or 劫火 is rooted in Buddhism, and it describes the great fire that erupts at the end of the world. So literally, it's a great fire from hell bringing the end of the world.

## Episode 7 - I Use My Privileges (4)

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How much time had passed?

“.....”

Barely managing to open my eyes, the ashen bricks that made the Room of Summoning came into view. Fortunately, it looked like there was some time left before I had to enter the Rite of Passage. If I close my eyes right now, I would go back to sleep. So with all my energy, I lifted my head off the ground.

As I imagined, there were message windows floating in the air. Lying on the ground didn't impede my view, so I rested my head back on the floor and started reading the messages.

You have received a shock that is beyond what the body is able to handle. Vitality decreased by 10 points permanently.

Congratulations. You have burned away all the waste and impurities within your body. Energy is circulating, the flow Magic Power has been greatly increased. Vitality 2 points, Magic Power 6 points, has been permanently increased.

The eternally blazing inferno, Hwajung has settled in your heart. Assimilation with Hwajung is currently at 100%.

Dazed, I read the messages one by one. When I saw the info about my Vitality, it was like a cold water was dumped on me as I

snapped back to reality. Reading the following messages, I munched on my lips. Seraph's voice streamed into my ears, soon afterwards.

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. Have you regained your senses? Are you alright? Player Kim Su-Hyun!”

Well, I have at least recovered my hearing. At that annoying voice that was constantly interrupting my thoughts, I was about to retort that she should already know my physical state.

“\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_.”

‘Wha, what? Why is there only air....’

My voice didn't come out. Rather, my voice did come but it was only a harsh rattle. My voice was gone. My heart felt hollow. No matter how much I tried to speak, only air passed through my throat.

‘Nothing left but wait for my body to recovered.’

Giving out a large sigh, I called up my Player Status. I decided to wait for my body to recoup by checking the status window with the privileges applied.

< Player Status >



Name: Kim Su-Hyun (0 Years)

Class: Secret, Sword Specialist, Master

Affiliated Nation: -

Affiliated Clan: -

Title: Principal who is required to validate his entitlement, a Spare Player

Nationality: South Korean

Gender: Male (23 yrs.old)

Height: 181.5cm.

Weight: 75.5kg

Alignment: Lawful · Chaos

(Before Change)

[Strength 94] [Resistance 92] [Agility 98] [Vitality 78] [Magic Power 90] [Luck 88]

(After Change)

[Strength 94] [Resistance 92] [Agility 98] [Vitality 70] [Magic Power 96] [Luck 88]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

< Achievements (0) >

1. The Third Eye (Rank: S Zero)

Description: Beyond the concept of ordinary eyes, The Third Eye falls under the Mystical Class. Put it simply, it is the ‘invisible eye’ linked to the principal’s instinct. Above the

concept of simple ‘sight,’ all events in present state are discerned through higher order perception.

Originally, this ability allowed for the perception to leave the present state to observe the esoteric realm, but having forcefully gained this mysterious strength without training or attaining enlightenment, the ability declined by 2 ranks. Due to the effect of the permeating energy of the pure fire from Hwajung, the Ability has been adjusted upward by 1 Rank. In effect, nothing can fool Player Kim Su-Hyun’s eyes.

< Special Ability (1/1) >

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1. Advance Weapon Mastery (Rank: Extra)

The ultimate pinnacle of swordsmanship, a zenith where sword and man become one. The moment a blade is held, a corrective action is asserted onto every swing. Although the blade has awakened to its limitations, the Player has yet to reach the pinnacle of swordsmanship. However through the years of experience and hard work, a multitude of achievement and class selection, the Ability has been adjusted upward by 2 Ranks.

< Latent Ability (0/4) >

---

1. Close Combat (Rank: A Plus)

Description: An Ability that surpassed the extreme of what people can do with a melee weapon. At this point, it is no longer a simple battle ability but a skill that had reached the highest peak attainable for humans. In close combat, it is impossible to be pushed back. Due to years of experience and hard work, with the current Class selection, the Ability has

been adjusted upward by 1 Ranks.

## 2. Last Man Standing (Rank : A Plus)

Description: Giving up a battle is a foreign concept. Defeat is unacceptable. With such will, even fatal injuries will not impede fighting ability. In the case of mortal wounds, battle is possible but the ability to maintain fighting power will be reduced by half.

## 3. Mind's Eye (Rank : A Plus)

Description: Seeing beyond the outward appearance, a mind's eye to see the target's inner being. Self-contemplation, the observation of all creation, the ability to detect or call forth similar phenomenon. With the heart governed by an iron fist, the principal can keep calm under the influence of mental pollution magic below S Rank.

## 4. Blessing of War (Rank : Extra)

Description: Athena, the Goddess of War and the Guardian of Peace. Only active on the battlefield, a single soldier can enjoy the Goddess's blessing on the field of battle. The player blessed with the divine protection receives the sight that spans the whole battlefield, and can pinpoint the location of any friendly forces in mortal peril. Having received a holy blessing, any damage caused by a magic ritual is always reduced. (This depends on the player's Luck Attribute and the Rank of the Ability. Player Kim Su-Hyun's Luck Attribute is at a respectable level, but this being a supreme divine protection, any magic ritual that is 1 Rank higher than the current Ability rank will receive some protection, magic ritual that is 2 Rank higher can still receive some damage reduction.

(Remaining Ability point: 0 points.)

Reading the player status, I was filled with both elation and regret. Close Combat and Last Man Standing had been received randomly so there was nothing I could do about it. Still, the Abilities weren't that bad and the Rank came out alright. More than anything, it should be as good as the Abilities I used in the past.

One thing that defied my expectation and blew up in my face was the reduction of my Vitality. This attribute was the attribute that propped up everything else and acted as the pillar.

Vitality, 70 points. I can pull the originally intended overall power, but 70 Vitality that propped it up was a very worrying problem. Using a car as a comparison, by design conditions everything was beyond outstanding, but the internals of the engine itself was very unsettling. In the case of engine overheating, there was a risk of burning or explosion. In the end, what Seraph and I imagined happened, both of us were half right.

The worry about Vitality whirled continuously in my mind, but there was no immediate solution. There was no certainty on how much I could increase it in the future, but I had to scrap and secure every free point I get.

'I am at 0 year but I did load up a 10-year physique.... Increasing it through training will be difficult.'

Still, it was a characteristic I could not solve immediately. Pushing these complicated thoughts in a corner, I decided to dedicate my entirety in healing my body. Because Seraph's glare was becoming hotter and hotter. Well, my Abilities are already dazzling as is, wanting more at this point is greed.

.....

I wonder how much time had passed. Maybe about 20 minutes, but I wanted to know the exact figure. I'm sure Seraph would provide it, but after I received all my privileges we didn't seem to be on talking terms. All conversations became extinct. I closed my eyes, whatever will be will be.

Slowly time passed and my body became colder. No, it wasn't a euphemism for death, the increased heat due to Hwajung's energy was leaking out into the surroundings. The hot fire within me was gradually being reduced and I was regaining the lost sensations.

The Player Status Window checked out. With the remaining time, I quietly meditated on my internal situation.

This was a huge drawback, but seeing life was still attached to my body, I achieved my goals. Having overcome a difficult ordeal, the reward was tremendous as the difficulty. Every waste and impurities in my body was boiled away, and all the pathways were unclogged.

Not only that, the place where Magic Power didn't flow to, the

minute acupoints within the hand and feet being pierced was an unexpected outcome. My energy flowed faster than before, the increased flow of my Magic Power and its efficiency could not be compared to its previous state. If a fight between two equal Player occurred and a minuscule difference decided who won, then I had several weapons hoarded within.

“Whew.”

I felt some of the sensation returning and tried sending out my Magic Power throughout my body. From hand to foot, I let it flow to the very tip of my body. Bit more confident now, I gently pried my right arm and found that I felt a lot lighter. Every joint in my body still creaked and ached, but comparing to before when I couldn't even feel anything, I was a whole lot better.

After a while, with great difficulty, I raised myself up. Lifting my face toward Seraph, I met her eyes. She looked disinterest, her eyes remained tranquil as she looked blankly at me. My cloth was more miserable than rags, but I didn't feel any shame. Because the woman in front of me was an Angel and couldn't be seen as the opposite sex.

Shrugging my shoulder, I tapped my left wrist with my right hand, indicating I wanted to know the time.

“Time to enter the Rite of Passage has come. Please be ready.”

Seraph's voice was cold and dry. She was definitely angry. The memory of her just now, rolling on her feet as she watched over

me came to mind.

‘.....’

I decided it was enough. I did not want any more quarrel with her. I got everything I needed anyways.

“I am ready. Transfer me.”

“Player Kim Su-Hyun. Is your condition alright?”

“Mhmm. It’s not bad.”

“.... Then I shall transfer you immediately. Time is short, therefore when you enter the Preparation Room, I advise that you act quickly as possible.”

“Sure, sure.” At my insincere response, Seraph’s beautiful brows were marred with a frown. However, she lightly lifted her fingers and flicked.

Snap!

With the sound of fingers snapping, my body became gradually transparent. How to explain it, like getting erased by an eraser?

“I shall give one advice, inattention in any situation is

prohibited. Please pass the Rite of Passage safely, it would be a pleasure to see you once more. Player Kim Su-Hyun, good luck..”

“Seraph. Nagging is prohibited from now on. Next time I see you, please keep your mouth closed.”

Kkung, Kkeeeeung.

After the light banter, I heard the familiar sound of machinery again. I kept my calm and looked down. A third of my legs had already faded, and soon the rest of my body would follow. I slowly closed my eyes as I saw myself fade.

A new start that was 10 years in the making. A new future would be established. The future that will come, a future that I will establish. Where no one would be lost, where no one would fall into despair. A future that I, Kim Su-Hyun, would change. These thoughts filled my heart with emotions.

# Episode 8 - Kim Su-Hyun, Beginning The Rite Of Passage (1)

---

The Preparation Room. A place I haven't seen for a long time. The room was well-appointed, any person who gazed on the Preparation Room without any context behind it would think it a perfectly replica of any room on Earth.

I came to a sudden epiphany, Angels really did like to focus on the most useless things. When I first came here, due to the sheer Earth-like environment, I tried to open the main door and leave. Of course, the door wouldn't budge and I remembered how I wallowed in despair. I wondered if this was done on purpose so the Angel's can poke fun at us.

Time remaining till the Rite of Passage: 03 Minutes and 26 Seconds.

“3 minutes and 27 seconds. I need to hurry.”

I walked toward the large, eye-catching box that was dumped in the middle of the room. Sitting in its corner, I opened the box. Inside was various items and equipment necessary for the Rite of Passage. I smelled like crap, but right now the most important thing was finding cloth to wear. Seraph was Seraph so it didn't matter, but I was near naked and if I was to be transferred to the Rite of Passage right now, I would be labelled as a pervert forever.

Digging through the box I saw one skintight cloth and discerned instantly that it had extremely good stats. But I just didn't have the

courage to wear something like that. Lifting this and that out of the box for a while, I went with simple clothes in the end. The underwear, socks, shoes, shirts and pants I chose were all common variety. Though they were all dark colours as to prevent stains.

Though considering the standard of the Rite of Passage, I could take it on naked and finish it within the day. If I wanted to, I could destroy everything within and it wouldn't even be a workout. But I had no plans to leap through right from the beginning. The biggest reason I survived for 10 years in Hall Plain was that I always hid 30% of my skills. Except for the times when my life was truly at stake, I made sure to never reveal myself.

‘Which weapon should I go with....’

When I came to choosing my weapon, I pondered for a bit. Just with my bare fist, I could make mincemeat of the boss monster found in the Rite of Passage, but having one would come in handy. Still, I had a plan to enact in this Rite of Passage. So just in case, I picked one tall sword and a detachable crossbow, and packing as many arrows as I could I closed the box.

After picking up the mass of arrows, I looked up in the air. I manage to see the remaining time converge to 0.

Preparation Room time has ended. Player Kim Su-Hyun will now be summoned to the Rite of Passage.

“Okay. Was I the last one?”

Yes. Regardless, Player Kim Su-Hyun I wish you luck. I shall begin the process for the transfer.

It was then.

Uwung!

I could feel the Summon spell being chanted in the air and a sharp tug on my navel.

The summon began.

\*\*\*\*\*

Transfer complete. Rite of Passage is a test which will see if you have what it takes to earn the entitlement to enter Hall Plain. To pass the test, you must survive for 7 days or arrive at the central warp gate within the 7 days. Player, I wish you luck.

The transfer was complete. Breathing in the fresh air and I looked around. I could feel the fragrance of the air subtly changing. Trees, grass, dirt, seeing it all it seems like I was in a middle of a forest. The forest air was clean and the wind was refreshing, but there was this unpleasant sticky feeling engulfing the area.

‘Well, for now, why don’t I see which Players I started off with.’

I personally thought the Rite of Passage was extremely important. Hall Plain was not a place you could survive alone. A party was necessary, even if it was built to take advantage of each other.

The Rite of Passage was a place that took modern, everyday people from their routine and breaks them out of it, with a condition to 'survive.' Another point of the Rite of Passage was for ordinary people who knew nothing to band together and reach the goal. (I was a special case with this being my second time, so consider me as an exception for the time being.) A lot of the times the Player who banded together and survived the Rite of Passage formed close ties even after entering Hall Plain. So my plan was to search for members to form ties with during this Rite of Passage.

'Of course, I can't let just anyone become a comrade.'

The point I was summoned to was one of the place indicating the start of the Rite of Passage. Or in other words, the starting point. The 10-year veteran me could speak of this event with little affecting me, but when I had first entered this place knowing nothing, I thought it was evil personified. This place was so bad it was enough to instil trauma even after entering Hall Plain.

Slowly clearing up my heart, I began looking around. Clearly, I wasn't only me that was transferred here. I saw people sitting restlessly out in the middle of the clearing, apprehension filled on their faces.

"Oppa.... Did you just see that person materialise?"

“Sol. Be quiet.”

“What do we do.... We are not the only ones....”

“Keep still. That person does look our age.”

Hearing their conversation, it seems they are brother and sister. I walked toward the clearing where the people were gathered. The atmosphere had sunk into quietness. Well, if they were shoved into the Rite of Passage abruptly and were told to survive it would have been a total chaos. But every person here was debriefed by an Angel, even me in the past.

‘This is the starting point. This is the past so I must have met the same people the first time around.... So what happened afterwards? I don’t recall....’

Counting the number of people in the empty lot, there was total of 8 sitting around. Was it possible to combine forces with these 8 for the remaining 7 days of the Rite of Passage? I can confidently say, ‘No.’

The conflict would come next. This wasn’t Hall Plain, but a place you passed once and never came again. With the strength I have, saving everyone here was child's play. But truthfully, I didn’t want to or thought to.

Flaunting my skills freely in front of these people and letting

them enter Hall Plain with evidence of my skill was something that had to be avoided at all cost. Gossip had the biggest effect of making a person famous or well known. The Players in Hall Plain took an initiative in protecting their vested interests, and if they heard a Player who used Magic before passing the Rite of Passage or defeat an overwhelmingly powerful monster? If such rumours spread, there would be so many troubling incidents, let alone the possibility of getting killed by 'Rogues.'

Also, I wasn't a good samaritan. There were times that I performed a good deed in Hall Plain, but I also performed evil without reserve when it was necessary. Theft, plunder, rape and even murder. Hall Plain was a place where such was the norm and not one person existed who would argue about it.

Anyways, the most important thing in this place was choosing the right people. If I met a person who was a worthwhile comrade, them knowing or not, I would have to nurture them in becoming a proper Player for at least a year.

The first thing I set out to do after I had entered Hall Plain was to gather comrades. The Rite of Passage was a suitable place to execute my plan. There was a total of three standards I was looking for in my compatriots. First, Attributes and Potential. Second, Alignment. Third, Affinity. I have said a lot of things, but the gist of it is that if the person was worthy to be my comrade I would rescue them, if not, I didn't care if they lived or died.

'I guess it's time to use my Third Eye.'

In the clearing, everyone was separate from each other except for

the siblings. After choosing a suitable place, I also sat down and quietly began to observe the people around me. If I was lucky, there is a chance I might run into a familiar face.

The first person that entered my sight was a woman who was wearing a bank uniform. Her overall impression was average, but her round eyes were twitching and her lips were trembling. It seems she still hadn't accepted this as reality. I could understand where she was coming from, but first I decided to active my Third Eye. I only needed to choose people I needed....

< Player Status >

Name : Lee Bo-Rim(Year(s) 0)

---

Sex : Female(27)

Height · Weight : 164.7cm · 58.3kg

Alignment : Neutral · Chaos

[Strength 5] [Resistance 8] [Agility 11] [Vitality 7] [Magic Power 9] [Luck 11]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

‘Huk.’

Forcing down a smirk, I collapsed her Player window. The initial Attributes were affected by the physique. More so, the potential

that the Player had was multiplied and then shown. This meant that female might not necessary have a lower physique stat than a male.

However, even for a woman's potential, Lee Bo-rim was below average. Helping such Player survive and enter Hall Plains was absolutely good for nothing at my level.

I digress for a bit, but after entering Hall Plain and a Player begins training, the Attributes grew quickly at first. I having already reached my limits, made it difficult to increase my Attributes through training. But every Player that started normally had no such restrictions. Regardless, even taking such factors into consideration, it was only after they passed their first summit that the Player looked promising. But what the hell was up with this person....

Clicking my tongue, I turned my gaze to the others in the clearing. My next target was the siblings who were glued to each other. The brother looked quite young, but seeing the frown on this forehead he seemed sharp. He looked younger than me, I wondered if he was one of those 'cool kids' as I noticed his trashy demeanour. Lying in front of them was a single pair of longsword and a shield. It was an acceptable choice.

The girl was stuck to him like glue, a sight that would disgust all singles.... Ah right, they were siblings. Carrying on, her head was bowed so I couldn't see her face clearly but she looks more well-behaved than her brother.

< Player Status >

Name : An-Hyun(Year(s) o)

---

Sex : Male(22)

Height · Weight : 178.8cm · 73.2kg

Alignment : True · Neutral

[Strength 48] [Resistance 47] [Agility 52] [Vitality 51] [Magic Power 35] [Luck 56]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

< Player Status >

Name : An-Sol(Year(s) o)

---

Sex : Female(19)

Height · Weight : 160.1cm · 45.2kg

Alignment : Lawful · Good

[Strength 8] [Resistance 17] [Agility 15] [Vitality 21] [Magic Power 75] [Luck 100]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

‘That’s insane, what is up with her? Magic Power 75? Luck 100? Right from the start?’

Attributes that was beyond common sense. I almost cried out in shock, but I closed my mouth shut and barely managed to prevent a fiasco.

Strictly speaking, An-Hyun is competent. That guy, as long as he doesn't suffer any unusual situations, could easily pass the Rite of Passage. He had enough potential to enter Hall Plain and live through it. While vexing to admit, his starting Attributes were higher than mine. Anyways, An-Hyun's Attributes were at a level that one would think, 'yeah it's possible.'

The reason I was truly shocked was when I glanced at that female, An-Sol, Attributes. It was truly bizarre. Not much to say about her Strength, Resistance and Agility. But starting off at 75 points of Magic Power and 100 points for Luck was completely preposterous in Hall Plain. I carefully sifted through my memories.

'I don't recall an An-Hyun.... An-Sol.... Wait, An-Sol? Sol? '

When the name Sol popped up, I suddenly recalled from the list of Secret Class I could choose with my privilege.

In my first run in Hall Plain, the Secret Class 'Priest of Brilliance' made its appearance. I think the other name for it was the final boss of all Priest Class? At that time a Player named 'Sol' had earned that Class, and soon after joined the Odin Clan, a Clan that was composed with only the best Players.

An-Sol, and Sol. Only the name was similar, but seeing An-Sol's

Attribute, the chance of it being her was high. Seeing the two were a sibling, I probably had to make sure both of them lived through this. Compared to the bank clerk Lee Bo-Rim, these two had unparalleled Attributes. They were suitable enough to be my comrades.

With such strong impact from these two, this time around I decided to look counterclockwise. The two people that were selected with my Third Eye was the two guys.

On the left was a guy who looked fit, but he was short and looked old. His nose was a bit bent, his rough skin gave off a vulgar impression. His gaze was constantly shifting around, looking everywhere, I thought he was trying to grasp the situation.

Next, on the right was a male who was wearing a school uniform. Below his eyes I could see tear stains on his pale complexion, he looked quite young. On the outside, he looked modest, but seeing his whole body crouched down with his arms around his legs, trembling, it was quite a sad sight to see.

‘I can’t recall.... What about his Player Status?’

< Player Status >

Name : Park Don-Gul(Year(s) 0)

Sex : Male(39)

Height · Weight : 179.4cm · 73.2kg

Alignment : Devil · Chaos

[Strength 31] [Resistance 26] [Agility 39] [Vitality 29] [Magic Power 29] [Luck 7]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

< Player Status >

Name : Lee Shin-Wu(Year(s) 0)

Sex : Male(18)

Height · Weight : 170.7cm · 58.4kg

Alignment : Lawful · Good

[Strength 25] [Resistance 23] [Agility 21] [Vitality 27] [Magic Power 35] [Luck 57]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

I am not sure if An-Hyun and An-Sol’s stats were so shocking, but Park Don-Gul and Lee Shin-Wu’s Attributes were not that bad. (But I am not saying it’s that good either.)

With Park Don-Gul’s basic Attributes he should be able to survive the Rite of Passage, the only problem was his Alignment. It was very rare for Devil and Chaos Alignment to show up together. It was most probable that Park Don-Gul was a criminal, and the

chance of him becoming a ‘Rogue’ in Hall Plain was one and the same.

Lee Shin-Wu was the polar opposite to him, his Attributes slightly lacking to pass the Rite of Passage but his Magic Power made up for it. Considering his high Luck Attribute, this suggested that his potential was quite high. His character must be innately good as well, as Lawful and Good Alignment appearing together was also rare.

Except for me and that Park Don-Gul guy, everyone was busy searching out their neighbours. But unlike the others, there was this greasy, unpleasant craving in Park Don-Gul’s eyes. His lecherous eyes were shifting and focusing only on the various women in the clearing. I had seen eyes like his a thousand times, even I had eyes like that once back then. I could roughly identify his transgression. Although it was pure guesswork, I think I know what crimes Park Don-Gul probably committed.

I was more convinced, after seeing how he was licking his lips looking at the girl sticking close to An-Hyun. With my past, I had no right, but even then I couldn’t help but think of him as a miserable wretch.

Clicking my tongue, I was about to use my Third Eye on the remaining two women in the clearing.

“Ah, fuck.”

That moment, Park Don-Gul guttural voice resounded in the

clearing.

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## Notes:

Revised Romanization of Korean or 국어의 로마자 표기법 took over the McCune–Reischauer romanization in 2000 and according to that, my Romanization is wrong. What does this mean? Not much seeing there are no standard for Romanizing names and according to RROK name romanization is usually done through personal preferences.

But you should have noticed that names are now hyphenated, this is for better disambiguation and to differentiate syllables. Another big reason for this change is that An-Hyun and An-Sol doesn't seem to have a family name.

# Episode 9 - Kim Su-Hyun, Beginning The Rite Of Passage (2)

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“Ha.... I can’t stand it anymore!”

“Eek!”

Park Don-Gul, who had been looking around shiftily for some time, seemed to have found the right moment as he shouted at the top of his voice and walked to the centre of the clearing. Lee Shin-Wu seems shocked at his sudden use of profanity as he gasped. I didn’t miss the instance where Park Don-Gul had that satisfied smirk while looking down at Lee Shin-Wu. As they say, he beat everyone to the punch.

“Hey! You guys, are you not going to do anything in this fucked up situation? Mhmm?”

An-Sol had dugged into An-Hyun’s side and was trembling harder. An-Hyun and the two women I couldn’t check, all had different expressions. One of them was relatively composed, but the other seems to disagree with the raucous caused by Park Don-Gul. Her eyes narrowed as she scowled at him. I was hit by an urge to check the Player status of the two women, but for now, I decided to keep watch on Park Don-Gul.

“Are you all deaf? Don’t keep your mouth shut, say something already!”

‘The fool.’

Did he want to show off his temper to the world? Or flaunt his masculinity? Park Don-Gul gestured violently and gave a fist-size rock near him a hard kick. The rock flew with a strong momentum and disappeared into the forest. The people in the clearing settled in an awkward silence at his sudden outburst.

But I could hear it clearly. Or rather what I didn’t hear - the rock falling back onto the ground.

Gureurung.

A low cry echoed through the silent forest. While nobody seemed to have noticed the sound of the rock, they all had heard the sound. Anxiety floated passed their faces. All of this was 10 years ago so I couldn’t remember everything, but the fuzzy memory popped in quick succession.

The memory of what had happened in this clearing.

“Sh, Shit! Who the fuck was it? If you have a fucking problem, come out. Come and face me! Is it you? No? You?”

Park Don-Gul began to despicably pick out the weak looking opponents. Lee Bo-Rim and Lee Shin-Wu were deadly pale as they hurriedly shook no. Then suddenly, the woman that was glaring at Park Don-Gul stood up resolutely. She was breathing in quickly to keep her temper in check.

“Ajussi, stop. Act your age and stop this nonsense.”

“What? What~? Stop? Act my age? Did you just said that to my face?”

“Sure, I did. What are you going to do about it? Aren’t you ashamed? We are all in the same boat so what is with your high and mighty bullshit?”

“You are swearing now? Bitch, didn’t your parents teach you to respect your elders? What kind of parents were they?”

“Bitch? Ha, let’s see~ let’s see.... Yeah, what did your parents teach you? Become a geezer and bully everyone? You piece of trash!”

I laughed heartily seeing the woman fighting back in equal measure without retreating one step back. Playacting as if he was initially taken back, Park Don-Gul chuckled. But soon anger overtook him as his face became pale and red. He breathed deeply from his nose and like a predator he stalked toward the woman.

Reaching the woman soon after, he stared down at her with a sinister look.

“Hey, Bitch. What did my parents do? Say it one more time.”

When a man came this far, anyone would chicken out. I am not sure if she was just a strong person or just lacked fear, but she continued to look Park Don-Gul straight in the eye and sneered.

“This is funny. You think I am going to be scared of you? Yeah, did your mommy and daddy taught you like that~? Bastard!”

“This bitch really want’s to die....”

Park Don-Gul seemed really ticked off as his fists rose slowly in the air. Even then, the woman didn’t blink an eye. It was the moment that Park Don-Gul was posed to beat the woman.

“Hey, Ajussi. Enough already.”

An-Hyun, who was silent till now, spoke up for the first time. Park Don-Gul, who was about the smack the woman’s cheeks, turned around and looked at An-Hyun comically. I could see An-Sol tugging at An-Hyun’s collar. However, An-Hyun ignored it as he opened his mouth once more.

“She’s not wrong. We are all in the same boat like she said. So what’s her crime?”

“You.... You bastard....”

Shame seemed to creep up on Park Don-Gul as he bit tightly on his lips. It seems he finally felt the gaze of everyone on the clearing and he slowly lowered his fist. The faint sneer on the woman was

visible, seeing that Park Don-Gul screamed out in frustration and just turned around from her. He went back and sat at his original position, wheezing out his pent up anger as nothing went as he planned.

“Fuck, what you looking at! Stop looking at me like that!”

Looks like Park Don-Gul couldn't keep it all down as he let off steam at the quietly sitting Lee Shin-Wu next to him. With the look of mortification at the mistreatment, Lee Shin-Wu moved away.

Then again.

Gureurung.

The cry we heard just before rang clearly in our ears once more, and from the depth of my faint memory, I could dredge up some details for the first time. While we were idly killing time, a surprise attack had scattered all of us. The cause was the rock that Park Don-Gul kicked and the raucous he created with that woman.

This was all the memories I had of these people. I don't know what happens afterwards, but seeing I never saw them again in Hall Plain....

‘Does that mean they all die in the Rite of Passage? Ah, so An-Sol might not be who I thought it was.’

If we waste time like we did on my first run through, we could be repeating history. No, I am certain the exact same event would occur.

I decided to give a little push, though nothing so direct as getting personally involved. First of all, I would give them a chance to move and work together. But that would be the total extent of my help. So with that decided, I lifted up my crossbow.

Clink!

“Excuse me. What are you doing....?”

Seems like everyone had become super sensitive, as the tiny noise I had made caused everyone’s gaze to focus on me.

The person who spoke up was the woman with quite a smart mouth. Though she seemed to have a general idea as she did not make any wisecrack remarks right from the start. Looks like the hate was embedded toward Park Don-Gul.

“Don’t you feel uneasy?”

“I feel more uneasy because of your crossbow.”

“Well let me see.... Where do you think we are right now?”

“What?”

The woman's eyes became wide. While her eyes were sharp, suggesting a fierce temperament, overall she had a pretty face.

“While coming to this place, I experienced a lot of outlandish things. Isn't it same for everyone here as well?”

“Well.... Yes, but....”

Heads nodded as people recalled their memories. The Room of Summoning, the Angel, the Transfer. They definitely experienced and witnessed all of it. This might be impossible to accept right away, but the most important thing was for them to accept that this was reality and become proactive in trying to survive the Rite of Passage.

On the open slot of the crossbow, I began to insert an arrow. The crossbow was smaller than average, but I could attach and detach it from my wrist making it quite convenient. I am not sure if it was the shriek early or my actions, but one by one, they began to hold the weapon they brought personally.

Soon after, excluding the people who came empty handed, everyone was armed. Most of the preparation was done. Looking around, I began to think calmly.

We were currently located in a clearing in the middle of the forest. Trees and bushes were packed outside the clearing. I began to walk away from the direction where Park Don-Gul kicked his rock.

I had only moved a few steps away from the clearing, but I could definitely feel it becoming darker. The trees and grasses I saw in front of me reflected a melancholic light.

With the growling, they would feel insecure up to a point. I felt the number of people following behind me slowly increasing. When I thought my actions was well thought out, my plan crashed and halted right from then.

“Ya, An-Sol. Get up. We need to follow that Hyung.”

“I hate it.... I don’t wanna go.... It’s scary....”

“Then are you going to stay here forever? You told me before. This place isn’t safe. We shouldn’t stay here. Why are you doing this now?”

“Sob....”

Hearing the siblings talk, I felt my eyes tense up automatically. Seeing that her Luck Attributes was 100 points, there might be something she felt. But that was mere speculation on my part. Seems she couldn’t overcome her instinctual fear as she had no plan to get her bum off the ground.

Gureurung! Gureurung!

In between their arguments, I could hear the growl. The sound had become louder, it had definitely come closer. At first, the group had waited patiently for the two, but soon after, one or two began to fret.

“Ex, excuse me. Can’t we depart first? To be honest, my body keeps on, can’t stop shaking....”

“Ye, Yeah!! Let’s leave these trash and go! Wait what did you say after that....?”

Lee Shin-Wu’s seems to have pulled whatever courage he had as his voice was cracked with sorrow. From Park Don-Gul, I heard immediate agreement.

I am not sure if he heard that, or if he felt as such as An-Hyun began to pull on An-Sol with greater desperation.

“Come on, stand up. I am right here. Please, just listen to me for once.”

“Bu.... But my feet won’t move.... Sob....”

An-Sol burst into tears at the end. Even in the midst of all this, Lee Shin-Wu and Park Don-Gul was giving them the look. It seems they want to leave this troubling place as soon as possible. Of course, I had no plans to abandon those two. Rather, ditching everyone else and travelling with those two had greater benefits.

“Let’s go! Why are we just standing around!”

“Uh, yes, quickly....”

As the commotion became worse, An-Hyun’s expression became hard. Then he suddenly slapped away the hand that was grabbing tightly onto his collar. An-Sol’s eyes flew open as she mumbled.

“O, Oppa?”

“Sure. Then stay here. I am going to go somewhere else.”

That was a load of crap, but his acting was kinda believable. After saying his piece, An-Hyun heartlessly turned his back on her. Armed with the sword and shield, he began to stride toward us. Seeing this An-Sol seems to experience a great shock as her mouth kept opening and closing. She shed fresh tears as An-Hyun’s spoke, “Sorry to keep you waiting. Shall we go?” Regardless of that, An-Hyun intentionally pressed us to go as he took the lead and pretended to walk toward the forest.

“Sob.... Oppa.... don’t go....”

“An-Sol, get up now. Can’t you understand the situation?”

“I was wrong.... Don’t leave me again..... Don’t go.... Sob.... Sob sob....”

“You.... Seriously, get up now!”

In the end, An-Hyun had to raise his voice with his eyes glaring fiercely. This seems to work a little as An-Sol stood up slowly, still crying her eyes out.

It was then.

Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung!

‘Oh dear, we dawdle for far too long.’

I felt dismayed. Not the one caused by fear, but the dismay caused by the uncertainty that I had changed the future and caused the death of An-Sol. The growl was a stone throw away from us, with the sound becoming all the more louder. The problem was, An-Sol seems to have lost it.

“O.... Oppa....”

We were gradually distancing ourselves from her, and seeing An-Sol dazedly stretching her hand for help, An-Hyun became even more resolute. No, it looks like he was pretending. The smart mouth lady gave in as she stepped into help, but An-Hyun held out his hand and stopped her.

“Just leave her.”

“Oppa! Don’t leave me!”

“Then come here by yourself. It’s not too late. If you can’t do this much, you definitely won’t survive.”

“Sob....”

With renewed vigour and confidence in his eyes, An-Hyun watched An-Sol intently. His sincerity must have been conveyed, as An-Sol clenched her teeth. Just a bit more and she should be able to rise by herself, but unfortunately it was too late.

Gureurung! Gureurung!

‘This growl, it’s a Deadman.’

Deadman. While the name incited a monstrous image, in reality, it wasn’t much. In fact, in Hall Plain, the Deadmans were so weak, Players did not even consider them as monsters. They had some intelligence and had the ability to infect others, but infection, if treated in time, could be completely healed. (Of course, treatment here was impossible.)

Also, if they had one characteristic....

Gyaaaaa!

They usually prowled about slowly, but when they found a prey,

the Deadmans began to run.

Screeching with delight, the Deadman jumped out from the forest. It's mouth wide open as it dashes toward An-Sol. This must have been completely unexpected for An-Hyun as he ran toward her, screaming.

“SOL!”

It wasn't only An-Hyun that was screaming.

“Aa, aaak!”

“Kya!”

The scene closely resembled a Zombie film. The monster's ripped flesh hanging from various parts of its body, pouncing and the party immediately descending into chaos. It's innards could be seen through its chest, and a rock was embedded in it. That rock was definitely the one that Park Don-Gul kicked just now. This monster must have been loitering around us after getting hit by that rock.

Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung!  
Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung!

The Deadman seems to be responding to the screams of the party, as from the forest, it's growl increased.

“Aaaahh!”

“Sol! Snap out of it! SOL!”

An-Sol, who had just managed to stand up, lost it completely when she saw the Deadman. An-Hyun had swiftly run toward her, but the Deadman was closer. An-Hyun must have felt it as well as he pulled back the hand holding the sword, and swung it hard toward the Deadman.

Shiiiiing! Puk!

‘Oh? A hit?’

With a great momentum, the sword slashed cut off the Deadman’s left arm. But that was it. The monster shambled and reeled, but it quickly recovered and snapped its attention to An-Sol as it ran toward her. It had finally reached her.

“Nooooooooo!”

Deadman jaws wide open.

An-Sol’s eyes agape.

And An-Hyun, screaming in horror.

I knew for certain then. With my various actions, I had without a doubt, changed An-Sol's future. Without hesitation, I fired my crossbow.

PING!

With a sharp striking sound, the arrow flew. With a PUK sound, the arrow cleanly pierced through the Deadman's head. The Deadman's weakness was its head. The rock had sliced into its chest, but it had no chance against the arrow to its head. With its mouth wide open, the Deadman fell.

Thud!

“Sh.... Shit....”

“Huk.... Huk....”

Everyone had the same reaction at seeing the monster. They all clutched at their weapons reflexively and have woken up to the realisation that this was not a joke. Sure, they knew the basics and had a vague feeling of what was happening, but it seems this showed them how serious it was.

In the midst of all this, An-Hyun acted swiftly. He dashed toward the still gaping An-Sol and lifted her up. And promptly returned back to our side. He must have been extremely surprised at the situation as his breathing was laboured.

Soon after, all eyes were on me. I shifted and faced forward. While it was only one, there would be more gathering soon enough. I could hear the surge in the growling. Without a doubt, more Deadman would be arriving here quite soon. If they managed to encircle us, it would be quite a pain in the butt.

Without a word, I continued walking.

# Episode 10 - Kim Su-Hyun, Beginning The Rite Of Passage (3)

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This suddenly reminded me a lot about the TV program I used to enjoyed. The show was about your usual run-of-the-mill people being placed in life threatening situations. The show said the people in such circumstance only acted rationally for 15 minutes. After that time I think it said that their reasoning disappeared and the people ran on pure instinct or whatever. If what the show said was true, did the people I was leading pass this phase already?

Currently, we were on catching our breath in an elevated area on the high hill within the forest. Rather than a gentle hill, it was more of a steep path that sapped everyone's strength. Breathing deeply, I turned around and look down from where we came from. It was just as I predicted. In just a short moment, the clearing we were in was packed with Deadman that crawled about.

Looking at the now fist-sized clearing, everyone was deep in thought. If we were just a step slower, it was self-evident that we would have become monster food. That energetic, smart mouth lady must be feeling the creeps as she was rubbing her arms.

They all had complicated expressions on their face. There were monsters about, and their lives were in danger. Having accepted such reality, their faces were dark with negativity and pessimism. But that was something I wouldn't be helping them with. Now it was time to stand back observe quietly. While I had their basic information, I needed to see how they reacted to situations.

“Huk! Huk! Shit.... What the fuck are those things?”

Having just climbed to where we were, Park Don-Gul was still breathing heavily. Looking at him, I shook my head in disapproval. If he just stayed quiet, he would have been somewhere in the middle of the group. But after all, the danger we were in previously was because of the rock he kicked. What I mean is that he was the source of the cause. If I was him, I would have stayed quiet in shame, but it seems he was thick-skinned and had no shame.

Giving out a sigh, I turned my head and saw that An-Sol was still crying on An-Hyun's chest. For a moment, I thought it was quite the pathetic sight. But I did learn one thing during this situation. If the crying An-Sol was the same person as the Brilliance Priest, her future was guaranteed to a point. Her Luck Attribute was 100 points, and that should certainly get her passed the Rite of Passage. However, the results spoke otherwise. What I just found out was that the future can change in the slightest different action.

Having felt my gaze, An-Hyun, who was wiping the tears off An-Sol, nodded in my direction. He seems to have realised that the person who fired the arrow at the Deadman was me. I could see the gratitude in his eyes. Nodding back in acceptance, I turned my gaze back down the hill we were on.

Gureurung! Gureurung!

“Gyah!”

“U-ang!”

I am not sure if it was some monsters near us or if it had followed us from the clearing, but there were two more Deadman trying to climb the hill. Nonetheless, the Deadmans couldn't run at us full speed.

When they find a prey, the Deadman runs extremely fast in a straight line. Despite that, if they make a turn or on a high elevation, their rush speed becomes significantly reduced. They can still climb hills, but a knife to the head before they managed to get up and that's that.

While the panic was less than the initial reaction to seeing the Deadman, there were still shrill of shocks. I am really sorry Lee Bo-Rim, but I have no plans to save her if I absolutely have to. The duet of screams Lee Bo-Rim and An-Sol performed still didn't sit right with me, also with her Player Status, I just couldn't find a use for her. She was blessed if she lived but was most likely doomed to die.

‘I should be seeing a reaction from them about now.... To unite, separate or maintain the status quo.’

If they wanted to talk to their heart's content, taking care of the those Deadman coming up was a priority.

Then. An-Hyun began to move. It seems he left his sword in the clearing as he set An-Sol aside and picked up a fist-sized rock. I was in the middle of loading an arrow into my crossbow when An-Hyun started, I wanted to see what he would do so I stopped momentarily.

If given a knife, I wonder how many guys in South Korea could hit a target at a distance? I wanted to see if it was skill or fluke that managed to cut off that Deadman's arm back then.

Different than before, An-Hyun was discreet as he measured the distance and the direction and threw it with all his might. And the result....

Puk!

“Really, they are not such a big deal.”

An-Hyun's stone throwing skill was impressive. With a Puk sound, the rock succeeded in breaking through the Deadman's head. Seeing the monster collapse haplessly, I saw a hint of realisation enter An-Hyun's eye as he finishes off the other rather simply.

“Yeah. They are not a big deal. So don't get a big head for killing those two.”

However, it seems that Park Don-Gul was exasperated at the weapon An-Hyun grasped. Still, An-Hyun wasn't about to just let that go, he stopped walking and stared at Park Don-Gul.

An-Hyun's mouth gradually opened to speak.

“This is all due to you, Ajussi. So thank you.”

“Eh? What are you talking about now?!”

“That monster that attacked our Sol just now, there was this heavy thing inside its chest. Thanks to that, I knew that a rock can go through the monster.”

Park Don-Gul seems to have caught the sarcasm, as his face immediately became red. An-Hyun’s words were blatantly stating that the cause of all the problem in the clearing was all because of the rock he kicked.

“Y’all think that because I kicked that rock we are in this situation? How do you know that rock was from me?”

“I don’t recall saying. Just thank you.”

Such impudence from An-Hyun seems to have drove Park Don-Gul mad. Yet, he seems to have realised something as he rather growled out his responses.

“Fuck you, you think you are all hot shit and stuff? Don’t you know it’s because of that girl that we almost died?”

“Girl?”

“Yeah, shithead, that crazy bitch next to you. Everyone is

following just fine and dandy, and here she is, not even a kid but can't even stand up by herself."

An-Hyun's expression hardened. It seems he couldn't respond to this accusation and kept his mouth shut. Feeling sorry for the accusation that her brother was suffering, An-Sol gently dabbed at her tears.

"Ah, I hate pretentious pricks like you. Think and tell me who was at fault here."

Still, we had the smart mouth lady with us. Without a doubt, she did not stay still. As she immediately leaps in support of An-Hyun, Park Don-Gul's expression became twisted.

"Ya bitch. If you don't shut your pretty mouth, I am really going to kill you. Mhmm?"

"And you shithead. If you were like me, I would have kept my mouth shut out of shame. Causing such mess like you know shit. And trying to appease that pretty thing."

"These damn miserable idiots really want to die today...."

All three were in the wrong, but Park Don-Gul seems to breed hate inside. He seems to have realised that the mood was turning against him as he shut up once more.

Just as we were coming out of danger, we plunged ourselves back

into a petty squabble. At this level, it wasn't simple animosity but full-blown vendetta. I once again felt that eroding heavy feeling rushing back inside. Out of habit, I groped for my cigarette but it was impossible I would such thing on me now. The idea of just cutting off Park Don-Gul to advance faster was slowly gaining ground.

Nonetheless, I decided right from the beginning to observe. It was still grating on me that after all the work I put into bringing them to this point, they had reverted back.

Whatever that had happened, in a small corner of their minds, they still remember what occurred in the clearing. What could I possibly do to make them into a single group? No matter how much I pondered, I didn't have a eureka moment. In the end, I decided we need to speed up and start moving. Strictly speaking, this place wasn't really a safe place.

Creek!

I intentionally made a loud sound loading my crossbow and without fail, everyone's eyes were on me. Waving off that everything was alright, I fitted the arrow into the crossbow and met everyone's gaze.

“For now, those Dead.... Hm. Those monsters, we should make it a priority to avoid them.”

“Everyone knows that already. But what can we do?”

‘This crazy bastard really wants to die.’

I barely kept my temper as I really wanted to stuff my arrow into Park Don-Gul’s mouth. Still, if there were only two of us right now, I would smash his mouth in a heartbeat.

“Right now, even if we unite, I don’t think it will be enough. So arguing amongst ourselves, I believe, is a waste of time. I will leave my place for a while. I think during that time it will be good for everyone to discuss and come to a consensus for our next course of action.”

I laid out a sound argument without the need of repeating myself. Of course, there would be questions, but the thing that was really unexpected was the one who asked.

“Why are you leaving your place? If we are having a discussion, won’t it be better for everyone’s input?”

The person who asked was one of the two women who I wasn’t able to observe the Player Status. She had a cold expression and looked about the same age, though one or two years younger. Without me knowing, she reminded me of another person with a familiar countenance.

‘Stop pestering me and figure it out by yourselves.’

“... Those monsters could jump out at us like in the clearing. Just in case I shall keep watch. So once the discussion is over, please

call me.”

“... Please don’t go too far out.”

I was a bit slow in responding but thankful, I managed to avoid causing needless suspicion. No one would argue against keeping watch in a dangerous area.

After saying so, I began trekking down to a spot I saw which looked like suitable concealment point. After having walked a fair distance into the forest and hiding myself, I activated my Magic. The senses on my whole body multiplied, and I could feel my vision and hearing becoming sharper. From where I was, they won’t be able to spot me. Though right now I could even hear their breathing, and had no problem observing them.

Having left the party, a cold ambience returned on the hill. The dreary feeling those Deadman emitted down below the hill was more encouraging than the mood of the party. I am not sure if their mouth were glued shut as no one step forward. Everyone had different expressions on their face, but the one to see was Park Don-Gul. As if he was thinking something serious his face was scrunched up and then changed to a grin, and back again. Was he really not a psychopath?

Time flowed. In manhwa and fairy tales, the hero always appeared and everyone survived well and good. Though it looks like in this party, there was no perfect leader to trust in. Wasting time like this was not the best of plans. As more time flowed, the anxiety in people’s heart grew, and it was likely that they would lose their rationality and act on instinct.

In that moment, two different women stood up.

Cautiously standing in the middle of the party was Lee Bo-Rim. Having stood up simultaneously, the smart mouth lady seeing her, sat back down on the ground. It seems like she was going to hear Lee Bo-Rim's stance first. With hesitance in her eyes, Lee Bo-Rim looked at everyone and spoke slowly.

“Eve, everyone, you all saw the monster just now. Truthfully.... I still thought this was a bad dream while the Assistant Angel was speaking to me, but I have no choice to accept that his is reality. I am scared. I am really scared, that I think I am going crazy. I am sure others are like me as well.”

There was no one who refuted her. Having felt everyone was focusing on her words, there was more confidence in Lee Bo-Rim's speech now.

“Truthfully, it was all thanks to that person on watch that we managed to survive. Even then, he is the same situation and we can't really rely on him forever. Right now, I think we should stop fighting, unite together and look for a path to survive.”

While it was a stereotypical speech, Lee Bo-Rim's words held the core aspect of the Rite of Passage. Unite and act. It looks like her word held some persuasion as the dead atmosphere in the hill changed slightly. And the dead looking Lee Shin-Wu finally opened his mouth.

“Then Nunna, what do you think we should do from now on....?”

His last words were hard to hear, but everyone could grasp the intention. She had come far as what I had said before, and to say the plan that came after. However, Lee Bo-Rim didn't seem to have thought so far ahead as she spoke hesitantly.

“That.... I don't know really know.... Only that, from now on, we shouldn't argue and exchange our opinions calmly.”

“I agree.”

Having preying on the morsel of an opportunity, Park Don-Gul found his chance and stepped forward.

Unlike before, Park Don-Gul was more gentle and composed. Seeing that, I immediately frowned. At first glance, he looked honest, but he couldn't fool my eyes. I recognised the expression for what it was, a very well practised act. Without a doubt, that guy was planning something devious.

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Notes:

시방 - Park Don-Gul is using a dialect for the word ‘Now.’

English is a diverse language, but I haven't come across a different dialect for now, but I think ‘Y'all’ provides the best fit in the context while keeping in character.

지지고 볶다 - Stop pestering me and...

A literal translation would be - stir and fry it. The phrase can be used like that but, in this context, it's an expression to say you are annoyed and to stop bothering you. I thought about mixing it like: Stir it, fry it, but stop pestering me and figure it out yourselves. But I thought it would be misconstrued and giving an image of cooking when there is no cooking.

# Episode 11 - Split In Half (1)

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“This again? If you stayed quiet, you could have just played along.”

Seeing the smart mouth lady coming to and fro, Park Don-Gul frowned again but didn't refuse her. Compared to before, he began speaking with a smoother voice.

“Didn't you hear what that Agassi just said? We shouldn't fight amongst ourselves. ”

“Why don't you think about your own actions before speaking?”

“Well, that's that. But right now, we are gathered here to share our opinions so why don't you hear my side first?”

People's winds were taken out of their sail, as they meekly acknowledged Park Don-Gul. As if thinking he ate something funny, the smart mouth lady's brows were slightly creased.

“First, I apologise for everything that happened at that clearing. My speech is rough, don't judge me on it. I am used to speaking like that, but it doesn't mean I hate you guys.”

Park Don-Gul looked around discretely before lightly stooping his head. While he still faced the disgruntled gaze, it had become slightly softer. Slowly moving to the centre of the party, he sought out the response from everyone. He must have thought the mood

was agreeable as Park Don-Gul went straight into the main subject.

“I agree with this bank lady’s words. Yeah. Arguing right now is wrong. Let’s bury our hate for each other and find a way to escape those monsters and live. Whatcha think?”

“.... Then continue.”

“It’s just like I said. I only agree with a part of it, not everything else. But if I go straight to the conclusion, everyone is going to criticise me. So I want everyone to realise the situation for themselves.”

“Which part are you unsatisfied about?”

As Lee Bo-Rim grumbled out her question, Park Don-Gul had a dreary smile as he replied.

“Finding a way to survive is obvious, but this ‘cooperation’ I don’t think so. Cooperate? It sounds nice, but look at the situation and search out your feelings. The only thing I hear is dogs sniffing grass.”

“Just when I thought you were saying something intelligent. Just go. Escape alone and live on your own.”

The smart mouth lady snorted out a laughter, but Park Don-Gul didn’t move an inch. Rather, he gave an assenting look as he nodded his head.

“Obviously, I already thought of that.”

“Then go.”

“Just hear me out. To the end, hmm? Hear everything out.”

As An-Hyun gave her a look, the hot-tempered, smart mouth lady close her mouth. Receiving the gaze of everyone, Park Don-Gul continued to speak at a leisurely pace.

“I am ignorant. And crude. But I don’t know how to lie. Because I am simple. At that clearing when I was running for my life, I felt a lot of things and thought a lot of things. After that, cooperating sounds offensive to my ears.”

At Park Don-Gul’s words, everyone shivered as if it reminded them of what happened in the clearing. As if he was waiting for such response, Park Don-Gul’s larynx moved slightly.

“Truthfully, I wasn’t just afraid, I was beyond terrified. While it’s quite embarrassing, my knee went numb and I almost wet myself. Think. Would you stay still when things that you saw only in TV and movies appeared right before your eyes? If that scout guy didn’t act fast, then most of us would be monster chow by now. So I agonised and thought deeply. I am not going to boast or threaten, so don’t misunderstand me. I know a thing or two about knives. Knives or whatever, right now whether it’s human or animals I won’t hesitate in killing them. Why? I don’t want to die. What happened in the clearing was just so sudden. I was really

surprised and bewildered but damn it, I want to live. So if it happens again, I am going to use this weapon so I can live.”

Park Don-Gul’s words were long. But, it hadn’t ended yet. Though they were uncertain, the party began to gradually focus on his words. Having already discerned his true nature, I clucked my tongue at this ploy, but for now, I decided to see where it would go. Park Don-Gul was still continuing on, as he pointed them out one by one.

“Others won’t see it, but I can. That thuggish looking brother over there looks like he worked out. He even brought a weapon and defeat some monsters, and.... You over there. If you could act as much as your big mouth, then maybe you could be of some help. The guy holding the crossbow, I don’t even need to say anything about him. And. Those four can definitely help out. What I am saying is that we can establish some kind of cooperation with the lots here. Don’t you agree?”

At Park Don-Gul’s words, An-Sol, Lee Shin-Wu and Lee Bo-Rim’s expression became dark. To simplify what he said, it meant those four were of useless. Soon after, Lee Bo-Rim gathered up her courage and spoke out.

“So you are saying you can’t cooperate with useless people?”

“Woh, woh. Calm down. I haven’t finished yet.”

“Just what....”

“Can you do what that guy did or maybe the crossbow guy? Do you think you can grab a knife or a stone and stab those monsters? All I see is a big fat no. Especially you, sticking next to him and squeaking whenever those bastards come out. That woman over there had the decency to keep her mouth shut. At least she didn’t hinder us, at that much, I don’t have anything say.”

The woman Park Don-Gul indicated was the person who just asked me why I was leaving my place. She still maintained her calm but cold exterior.

There was silence before Lee Bo-Rim spoke again with a shaky voice. Compared to before, her voice was quite dead.

“So in conclusion, we are going to abandon people who are useless....”

Lee Bo-Rim seemed unable to get over what was said, and this made me think what kind of person Park Don-Gul was. While I knew where he was leading this too, his current act did open up for deeper introspection. Early on I thought that his head was full of shit, but he had correctly discerned the current situation and spoke logically. Regardless of his ulterior motives.

Seeing the despondent Lee Bo-Rim, Park Don-Gul’s confidence was restored as he showed his yellowish teeth and spoke.

“Why are you jumping ahead. I haven’t spoke of such thing yet. Don’t be so sensitive. The world is give and take. If we are going to cooperate, it just means that you will have to prove your worth. If

we head out now with this vague cooperation, what do you think will happen? That thuggish guy will be too busy taking care of his girlfriend, and that kid will be frozen solid that he might drag us down. What I am saying is that I don't want to cooperate or protect idiots. For me, my life's the most important. Isn't it the same with you?

That smart mouth lady didn't seem to have anything to say, as she only clenched her hand tightly. The bank lady's face was positively red, and I could see that her hand was clenched tightly in a fist. She was trembling but didn't say anything. Park Don-Gul leisurely observed the state everyone was in, and he must have felt it was time for the final blow as he spoke with great fluency.

"I am sure everyone feels the same, that their life is the most important. If you acknowledge that, then let's talk frankly. We can't cooperate with some people here. Just look at us now, we are flying blind. You there, kid. Don't you agree?"

Being pointed at, An-Sol looked to Hyun with an embarrassed face as her mouth moved up and down. Seeing her mouth mumbling, it seems she had something to say but words didn't come out as intended and she bowed her head again. Seeing that, Park Don-Gul lifted his two shoulders in an exaggerated manner as spoke again.

"This guy knows it as well, didn't he tell the kid to walk on his own? If we did as the crossbow guy said, we wouldn't have been in such situation. Mhmm? Why are you reacting like that? Am I barking some nonsense again?"

It wasn't pure nonsense. Regardless of his intentions, Park Don-Gul's evaluation was correct. The problem was that he threw a fastball at the people who needed help.

“If you think I am wrong, prove yourself. Go downhill and kill one or two of those monsters and drag it right in front of me. I will shut up right then.”

“.....”

It seems he said everything he needs to have said as Park Don-Gul moved back to his spot. I was curious about everyone's response. I moved my gaze and slowly observed everyone's expressions.

An-Hyun seemed deep in thought as he had his eyes closed, An-Sol was trembling lightly next to him. Though the most pitiful amongst them was Lee Bo-Rim and Lee Shin-Wu. They were definitely targeted early on by Park Don-Gul. I could see their teeth were chattering due to nervousness.

For a while, no one spoke up, but the first one to speak up again was An-Hyun.

“I understand what you are saying.”

While An-Hyun usually kept his silence, he glanced at his sister before speaking with a clear voice.

“Sol is not my girlfriend, she's my sister. I don't have the

slightest intention to abandon her.”

“Oppa....”

Touched, An-Sol suddenly hugged An-Hyun. Seeing those two, Park Don-Gul didn’t seem to have known that as he rattled out a response.

“Siblings? I didn’t know that. Well, we can’t do anything about that, but nothing changes. Who can guarantee that what happened before won’t repeat itself?”

The situation was turning out to be quite fun. As he couldn’t target An-Hyun directly, Park Don-Gul had targeted the cumbersome An-Sol to pressure An-Hyun.

It looks like Park Don-Gul had chosen to leave by himself. However, he didn’t want to leave quietly as he had shaken everyone’s confidence. An-Hyun didn’t speak anymore, and the hill became silent. The atmosphere had become so silent I couldn’t even hear their breathing.

“Well, don’t think so badly of me. I droned on for a bit, but the situation too uncertain right now, it’s just lukewarm. Also, a lot of people already seems to hate me.”

“So what. What is it that you want....?”

Regardless, when the smart mouth lady asked with less bite than

before, Park Don-Gul responded immediately.

“What I want, is for us to create a proper ‘team’ right now.”

## Episode 12 - Split In Half (2)

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No one spoke a word. Park Don-Gul's words stabbed deeply into everyone's hearts. Wetting his lips with his, Park Don-Gul continued.

“There is no need for trust when everyone thinks their own life is the most important. What I want is a team that helps each other and won't drag us down. I only want people who are prepared for this.”

“That's.... too much.”

Lee Bo-Rim replied in anguish, but it didn't look like she would give in. Still, the people who kept Park Don-Gul in check, An-Hyun and the smart mouth lady kept their mouth closed. Lee Bo-Rim's face was filled with hopelessness and she had responded in utmost desperation.

“Go ahead and call me selfish. It's not like anything will happen. But mark my words, if this doesn't seem like it will work, I will go alone. It seems like you guys hate me already.... And truthfully, I don't think I am the only one that's tired of this halfway attitude. That crossbow guy must have gotten frustrated so he left to go and keep watch. You guys, start using your brains.”

“Are you joking? Being useless. Or being absolute no help, how do you know without trying first?”

The smart mouth lady disputed immediately. However, there

was no strength in her voice. Park Don-Gul looked like he just caught a prey, as he replied with a satisfied look.

“Know without trying first....? Are you joking with me?”

“What?”

“Do you still think this isn’t reality? Are you running around thinking you have extra lives? This isn’t a computer game where you can save and load. Wake up! If we bumble ahead and someone makes just one mistake....”

Halting for a bit, Park Don-Gul took his thumb and dragged it across his neck.

“We all die.”

His last words seem to have been a great shock to everyone as they all looked shaken. Lee Bo-Rim just stared down at the ground with a vacant expression, and the smart mouth lady just chewed on her lips. Still, the only person who kept her composure was that icy woman.

“Don’t take it the wrong way. I already know you hate me. I understand why and I apologise again for that. But don’t act on useless nonsense. I haven’t said anything about abandoning anyone.”

Seeing their response, Park Don-Gul gave out a fishy laughter as

he thumped his chest.

“Now that’s been said, let’s all decide. Anyone who agrees with what I said, come to my side. I will welcome anyone who is prepared.”

As Park Don-Gul concluded, there was a strained tension that lingered on the hill. Shaken by his words, everyone eyed each other. While I hate to acknowledge it, his words had effectively rattle their minds. Under his speech, Park Don-Gul had manipulated the people’s yearning to survived, and played on that instinct.

The repercussion from that backlash began to spread. An-Hyun and An-Sol were deeply troubled, even the smart mouth lady who constantly went head to head with Park Don-Gul was hesitating. In contrast, that good-for-nothing Park Don-Gul was playing around with his iron rod with a relaxed attitude.

Frankly speaking, I didn’t care as long as An-Hyun and An-Sol didn’t go to his side. Nevertheless, to prepare for the unknown I used my Third Eye on the smart mouth lady and the one other woman I had yet to analyse. I had to at least check on the Attributes. My first target, with quite an expectation, was the smart mouth lady.

< Player Status >

Name : Lee Yu-Jung(Year(s) o)

Sex : Woman(22)

Height · Weight : 166.3cm · 51.7kg

Alignment : Good · Neutral

[Strength 32] [Resistance 38] [Agility 50] [Vitality 30] [Magic Power 48] [Luck 46]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

“Hmm.”

I was wondering what stock she put into to confront Park Don-Gul like that, and looking at her Attributes, she definitely had what it took. While An-Hyun and An-Sol had ridiculously impressive stats, this early on her attributes were nothing to scoff at either. She was especially blessed with the high Agility and Magic Power, as it was like opened up two different branches of Magic. I decided to keep an eye out for Lee Yu-Jung.

Next, I turned my Third Eye to the last woman. She stirred up my curiosity as well.

< Player Status >

Name : Kim Han-Byeol(Year(s) 0)

Sex : Woman(21)

Height · Weight : 170.2cm · 48.5kg

Alignment : Lawful · Chaos

[Strength 28] [Resistance 32] [Agility 46] [Vitality 24] [Magic Power 68] [Luck 40]

(Remaining attribute point: 0 point.)

< Unique Ability >

Charisma (Rank: F Plus)

“Huk.”

The moment I saw the Unique Ability, without me knowing, I exclaimed in surprise.

‘This is ridiculous. Charisma?’

The shock I received was similar to when I check An-Sol’s information, and I was left momentarily speechless. I could now understand why Kim Han-Byeol reminded me of ‘her’ when I first saw her. She had the same Charisma ability as ‘her.’

I was left with fleeting regret that I shouldn’t have seen her status, but I shook my head to clear that thought. My thoughts became crowded. Based on my initial plan, both Lee Yu-Jung and Kim Han-Byeol were the right type of people I couldn’t let go of.

My mind was uneasy, and out of habit I gathered sand in my

hand and let go. Fear and doubt entered my heart. An-Hyun and An-Sol. Lee Yu-Jung and Kim Han-Byeol. These four exceeded the average starting Attributes in Hall Plain. Even if we were all completely scattered, with their Attributes, they could all survive.

‘Is there something I overlooked?’

No matter how much I thought, I couldn’t find an answer. Although I had several hypotheses, there was no definite conclusion. For now, I decided to put the matter aside. To observe the situation again, I activated my Third Eye once more. I was of the mind to drag the four of them with me, and I would have plenty of time to scrutinise them later.

\*\*\*\*\*

The very first person that stood up was Lee Shin-Wu. His Alignment was Lawful · Good, and while this indicated he was friendly, it also had it's disadvantageous. Most of the times, people with such Alignment didn’t have a backbone and were led by others. While it was unfortunate letting someone go with such Luck Attribute, there was nothing to him other than that, so I sent off with a light prayer.

“I, I want to be part of your team!”

“Mhmm....”

Park Don-Gul evaluated Lee Shin-Wu with a critical eye before

speaking in a rough voice.

“You will have to protect yourself. The moment you become a hinderance, I am going to throw you away without hesitation.”

“Yes! I understand! I will try my best!”

“... Good! If you fulfil your role, then I will do my best to support you. Let us do our best to survive in this hellish world. And.... I am sorry about before. I was too arrogant. Please forgive me.”

When he received Don-Gul’s positive response, Lee Shin-Wu ran toward him with a relieved expression. The scene of them drawing closer, was truthful, not a wholesome sight. For now, having recruited Lee Shin-Wu, Park Don-Gul’s next target was An-Hyun.

“You there. You should think carefully. If it’s you, I will welcome you anytime.”

That good-for-nothing idiot had deliberately and forcefully emphasised ‘us’ when he asked to join in a polite voice. An-Hyun’s face was full of worry. He was at a crossroad and the path was his to choose. Not only An-Sol, but everyone else swallowed heavily as they waited for An-Hyun’s decision. After a while, An-Hyun slowly opened his mouth.

“My answer remains the same. I am not going to abandon my sister.”

His voice didn't fluctuate and had responded firmly. Immediately, An-Sol's face brightened considerably and the bank lady seemed more reassured. Though, An-Hyun wasn't finished.

“However.... That team you spoke of, it you will include Sol, than I might accept.”

‘Oh dear.’

With that, the ball was in Park Don-Gul's court again. This was an unexpected boon for Park Don-Gul, as the choice was now his to make. His slightly pained look morphed into an unwelcome expression as he replied.

“That's a bit complicated. Truthfully, I don't know about you, but your sister Sol will be difficult to protect and we have no intention to either.”

“You don't need to worry about that, as I can do the work of two people.”

“No, it's not that simple. There are situations where it doesn't work.... Like in the clearing, if she drag us down it will just be more trouble.”

“Then it can't be helped....”

“Just leave it for now. We will figure it out after all the team members have been decided.”

Park Don-Gul had intentionally cut off An-Hyun to give himself a leeway later on. Under all his talk, there were minute calculations and manipulations. In truth, there was only me and An-Hyun that actively fought against the Deadman. Yet, I wasn't amongst them and the scale would tip in whichever direction An-Hyun went. Of course, there was a risk of not accepting An-Hyun, but Park Don-Gul had left himself rooms to manoeuvre and succeed in shaking the party once more.

“You.... Well, do whatever you want. Always point out to do this, do that, it's just troublesome to deal with you.”

Park Don-Gul grumbled toward Lee Yu-Jung. She didn't say anything, but only frowned at that. He turned his head without regret and looked toward the still Lee Bo-Rim and Kim Han-Byeol.

“Then.... I want to hear from the rest of you as well.”

“.....”

“As I said, don't misunderstand me. If I was going to abandon everyone, would I have accepted my friend over here? This kid said clearly that he won't drag me down, he will protect himself and help out willingly. I didn't take this role because I wanted to, I was really going to leave by myself. Anyway, I did this to survive. If you want to join this team, just promise in front of everyone just like the kid did.”

“How can I....”

The person who responded, in the end, was Lee Bo-Rim. Glancing at Kim Han-Byeol for a moment, Park Don-Gul replied immediately.

“That you won’t need blind protection and will help out the team however you can. If you won’t be any help at all, I will throw you away like trash. But if you are useful, we will help you out to the best of our ability. Those who are willing to harden their hearts, come to his team.”

Being useful to the team in any way possible. The nuance of his words was very strange and full of danger. Seems like Lee Bo-Rim had dimly realised such truth as she still looked hesitant. Kim Han-Byeol looked full of contempt. Licking his lips, Park Don-Gul spoke to Kim Han-Byeol this time.

“You as well.”

“.... Wait a minute.”

Kim Han-Byeol still had that icy exterior, but she closed her eyes as if she was in deep thought. I was slightly worried, but if I was right, then the chances of her withholding her decision were high. It seems Park Don-Gul allowed that much as he stepped back a bit and stood shoulder to shoulder with Lee Shin-Wu.

The obvious choice of rejecting the team was stuff that happened in novels or manhwa. In reality, a human’s emotion was a weak animal. Even more so when their ‘life’ was on the line, they threw

away their pride easily as if it was an everyday occurrence.

I wonder how much time had passed?

In the end, the first person to stand up was Lee Bo-Rim. She feebly nodded her head, and spiritless walked toward walked step by step next to Park Don-Gul. She looked like she was facing a deep inner conflict, but she dropped her head and joined next to Park Don-Gul and Lee Shin-Wu.

Park Don-Gul had a pleased smile on his face.

## Episode 13 - Split In Half (3)

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Under Park Don-Gul's suggestion, An-Hyun looked deeply troubled. If someone other than Park Don-Gul was making a team, then I am sure he wouldn't be this conflicted. An-Hyun's natural inclination could not allow him to trust Park Don-Gul. No matter the glossy speech, there was some unspeakable darkness that An-Hyun had sniffed out.

Regardless, Park Don-Gul had pronounced a just cause. No matter what he said, he was targeting those three (An-Sol, Lee Shin-Wu, Lee Bo-Rim) and had managed to grasp the two of them.

An-Hyun's anxiety had grown as large as it could. He couldn't abandon his sister, but the very action of said sister at the clearing already answered his dilemma. To make matters worse, he lost the privilege to choose. Having given that privilege to Park Don-Gul, he was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

If the advantage continued to roll toward Park Don-Gul, then the chances of An-Hyun, An-Sol and Lee Yu-Jung being left behind was high. Ironically enough, Park Don-Gul himself did not know that such action was leading him in digging his own grave. My perspective was completely different from others. I looked at the person's Alignment and their Attributes and judged if the person can survive. Park Don-Gul, however, did not care for such abilities or even wanted such things.

From the very beginning, the team I and Park Don-Gul wanted had different standards. I wanted companions that could help me after we arrived in Hall Plain, Park Don-Gul just wanted a team he

could dominate.

This situation, if you see it in one way, was quite a boon for me.

Still, the power would slide in whichever direction Kim Han-Byeol and I went. As I wasn't there, the gaze naturally turned to Kim Han-Byeol. Speaking of her, she had been thinking for a while now. She looked around the surrounding for just a moment, shook off the dirt and stood up. Seeing her lightly biting her lips, it seems she hadn't made her choice yet.

"I think we should bring the person keeping watch back here."

After thinking for so long, the words she spoke did not contain any choices. The party who had been anxiously waiting on Kim Han-Byeol's choice gave out a loud sigh.

Babbling something like, "Ah, yeah, right." Park Don-Gul gave out a vague acceptance.

"Well.... Bring him on board. On the way back, explain to him what happened and tell him to choose. We don't have all the time in the world, so stop with your setups. Ah. Wait a moment. "

Park Don-Gul's words managed to latch onto Kim Han-Byeol from turning away. Fixing the best smile he possibly could, he continued on.

"You or he can be a big help. So when you are coming back,

please speak well. I will make sure you won't regret it. Anyhow, seeing that...."

While speaking, he glanced hastily at An-Hyun and intentionally muddled his words.

"Anyhow, you two are welcome on my team. So I hope you make the right choice."

Park Don-Gul's acting had reached its climax and was putting on the finishing strokes. Lee Shin-Wu seemed already reliant on Park Don-Gul, as he sent an encouraging signal to Kim Han-Byeol. The winner of this round was Park Don-Gul. No matter how distasteful it was, he had achieved the goal of his scam.

While he stumbled at the start, his age wasn't just for shit and giggles. Lee Shin-Wu and Lee Bo-Rim just knew yet that they were no more than meat shield or his plaything. Or maybe they did know but surrendered everything for the sake of living.

Seeing Kim Han-Byeol approaching, I slowly closed my eyes. I had a headache and on another side, I was quite lucky. If I was determined I could have impeded Park Don-Gul's plan, but then I would lose all purpose of leaving that discussion in the first place. Although it wasn't intended, this could become a win-win for me.

Park Don-Gul had grabbed the initiative and chased off An-Hyun and Lee Yu-Jung, allowing me to secure three of the four I had in mind. Before his murderous intent was a hindrance, and it would be a complete stupidity in not letting him disappear by his

lonesome.

While it was frustrating to see the people I had in mind hanging onto his ornate speech, it had come down to each of their own personal problems, so I didn't need concern myself with it. Now if I could lead the last remaining person in the right direction, I felt this debacle would solve itself quite quickly.

Sak Sak.

While my eyes were closed, I could hear the grass shuffling behind me. I didn't need to turn around to guess who it was. I immediately arose myself and mounted the crossbow on my left arm. Whenever I saw Kim Han-Byeol, it always created a weird feeling in me as it reminded me of 'her.' Pointing my crossbow in the general surrounding, I did my best in pretending I was hard at work in keeping watch. Soon, I heard a rather low voice calling for me.

“Excuse me....”

“Yes?!”

As I turned with a slight surprise on my face, I could see Kim Han-Byeol tranquil eyes staring back at me. I intentionally massaged my left arm as I tried to look pained.

“I did hear one or two roars, but I don't think they are near us yet.”

“Thank you for the hard work. The discussion is almost over, so I think you should come back now.”

“Then let’s head back right now.”

Looking as naturally as possible, I turned around to head back. As I predicted, Kim Han-Byeol caught me.

“Wait.”

Turning around once more, I could see a hesitant Kim Han-Byeol opening her mouth to speak.

“Well.... The conversation went into a weird direction.”

“Weird direction?”

“Yes. It happened like this....”

Kim Han-Byeol nodded and explained everything that had happened. I wanted to discern what she was feeling inside as I listened to her story, but she was very objective and only spoke of the core issues. I was quite impressed by it as in situations like this, the person usually took a side.

“So presently, that is what happened. Well.... What will you do?”

After finishing her story, Kim Han-Byeol bit into her curiosity and asked which side I would take. I had already decided long ago, but I showed a worried face as I stooped around.

“I didn’t expect it would go in that direction. I am still undecided.”

“Me as well.”

“What do you think about this Ajussi’s words?”

Looking into my eyes, she spoke in a quieter voice than usual.

“I don’t think it’s wrong, but....”

“Is there something not to your liking?”

“...Yes. Whenever I see that Ajussi, I feel very uncomfortable. But strangely enough, I can’t find anything wrong with what he said.”

Lee Shin-Wu and Lee Bo-Rim had gone over to the other side. Seeing them, Kim Han-Byeol began to worry.

I realised then, for the first time, why she personally came to bring me back. Though I wanted to talk more, quite a significant amount had passed so I kept quiet and continued walking. Just confirming part of her worries and spreading seasoning over it

should be enough.

Both of us were silent, but without a doubt, Kim Han-Byeol was following behind. After I thought this issue stewed enough between us, I opened my mouth to speak again.

“I don’t like what that Ajussi said.”

“.....”

“From the beginning, he mixed logic with loopholes. That’s why what he said can only be wrong. He wrapped these blindspots in logical reasoning, and made it sound advantageous for him.”

While there was no response, I felt a silent gaze telling me to continue. While Park Don-Gul pulled out all his stops, there was no way I could let Kim Han-Byeol go. So I decided to explain one by one what she was troubled with.

“There is one way to differentiate the truth from lies. Can the person keep his words? That Ajussi, does he look like a person who can keep his words?”

“No.”

Kim Han-Byeol answered immediately.

“Since the moment we met, I had a dirty impression of him and

all his actions is trying to destroy the team. Rather than trusting in his uncertain words, it would be better to stick with the remaining people than joining his team. So I will remain.”

Taking a peek behind me, Kim Han-Byeol seems to be chewing on my words. Not a minute had passed, but from afar the party came into view and she whisper to my back.

“I am worried about the two people that joined.”

This was as good as a confirmation on Kim Han-Byeol;s decision. I thought it was good that I decided to go about a roundabout way describing my thoughts than throwing a straight ball. If I said from the beginning, “That bastard Park Don-Gul is trying to swallow Lee Bo-Rim and Lee Shin-Wu alive. So please don’t go, if you do, you are going to be taken advantage of” she would distrust me as well. She looked like a smart person, and from the small hint, she seems to have immediately grasped the meaning.

After a short while, I could clearly see the two separate groups on the hill. The situation was no different than the last time I view them from afar.

On one side was An-Hyun, An-Sol and Lee Yu-Jung. On the opposite side was Park Don-Gul, standing along with Lee Shin-Wu and Lee Bo-Rim.

When we reached the hill, all six pairs of eyes was focused on me and Kim Han-Byeol.

\*\*\*\*\*

“You came only now. Anyways, thanks for the hard work in keeping watch.”

Seeing Park Don-Gul spewing his nonsense already, disgust surge within me but I forcefully kept it down. An-Hyun had silent eyes. An-Sol had uneasy eyes. Lee Yu-Jung had nervous eyes. Lee Shin-Wu had trembling eyes. Lee Bo-Rim had helpless eyes. Seeing various emotions, I felt strange. I didn't go straight to them but stopped my steps. Kim Han-Byeol followed suit and she also stopped.

“I thought you would come quick. Anyway did you at least hear what happened?”

“Yes, I heard.”

“Somehow it became like this. It's difficult but try to understand. This is all so that we can survive.”

I could hear Lee Yu-Jung spewing profanity in a low voice. Regardless, Park Don-Gul strode toward me and opened his hand toward me.

“Come to our team. We can become friends. If it's you, and that Agassi behind you are welcome.”

The atmosphere rose to maximum tension and everyone awaited my reply. Without a care for the other's nervousness, I rejected his

hand and answered in a cold voice.

“I can judge for myself who I can become friends with. Thank you for the invitation, but I must decline.”

Park Don-Gul didn't even blink. He didn't withdraw his hand but rather asked Kim Han-Byeol.

“... and you?”

“I can't trust you.”

Of course, Kim Han-Byeol turned away from him. Looking at the two of us, Park Don-Gul made insidious remarks.

“Ha~. So that's how it is. I don't know what story that fox told you, but you will definitely regret this.”

“If you know the value of your own life than I hope that you would value to lives of others.”

“Stop with the bullshit. Even though I tried....do as you like. I have no plans to force people who hate me. Don't bother asking to join the team later.”

“That won't happen.”

“Shin-Wu. Bo-Rim. Let’s head out! If we stay with these hypocrites any longer, we won’t last the day!”

Seems like they already introduced themselves. Seeing him forcefully dragging out Lee Shin-Wu and Lee Bo-Rim, it felt like a huge burden has been lifted. I walked sedately toward the remaining people. In their eyes, I could see reassurance and unfamiliar kindness toward me. An-Hyun gave out a large sigh as he spoke to me.

“Thank you for the hard work. As you saw.... That happened.”

“Hmm. It’s good that it happened. We shouldn’t let this get us down. They are the ones that wanted to leave, so let them do as they like. Live or die, they will sort it out by themselves.”

I was surprised by myself as I laughed at Lee Yu-Jung thorny words. As she said, they had left. We weren’t the ones abandoned, rather, we were the ones that remained.

These two words, they held a huge distinction.

## Episode 14 - Split In Half (4)

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“We should worry about ourselves rather than those who have gone. Wouldn’t it be a better idea to leave this hill and escape the forest?”

I directed my comment to An-Hyun, not the others. As I set my sights on An-Hyun, Lee Yoo-Jung and Kim Han-Byul naturally looked towards him too. It seemed like he had some experience with being a neighborhood leader, as he didn’t seem the least bit bothered by the attention. He stood up and promptly agreed, before focusing on the various paths down the hill.

“Going down is a good idea, but I’m afraid I don’t know which route is suitable. I mean, right now, we don’t even know where we are...”

An-Hyun lifted his head again. As he spoke he alternated glancing between the path Park Dong-gul and his team took, and the empty lots swarming with Deadmen. Park Dong-gul’s route was in the complete opposite direction of the vacant lots. Although it may have seemed like a good idea at the time, An-Hyun was certain it wasn’t a good choice.

“I think we should go this way.”

Kim Han-Byul, who hadn’t spoken at all, pointed towards a direction. They followed her finger and saw that she was pointing around 90 degrees away the empty lots. As if guessing how far the lots were, she asked nervously, “Isn’t it better to go the opposite

direction? It seems like that way isn't very far from the lots."

Kim Han-Byul was someone who thought a lot like Park Dong-gul.

An-Hyun pondered for a moment and then immediately exclaimed, "Ah!" He seemed dumb and clever at the same time. Seeing Lee Yoo-Jung's puzzled expression, Kim Han-Byul calmly began to explain. "It's simple. Currently, most of them are gathered in the lots. From this we can assume that they are evenly distributed throughout the forest. So, if one area is crowded it means the others aren't. The best chance we have is heading in this direction."

"The opposite way could be even more dangerous. They could be waiting for us there."

After listening to An-Hyun's explanation, Kim Han-Byul showed her agreement by nodding slightly. Even though it wasn't exactly the same as my escape plan, I was still relieved. In any case, it seemed things were finally moving along. I smiled silently to myself.

"I guess you're right. That probably means that bastard might have taken the more dangerous path, right?"

"Yup. At any rate, let's head straight down and get out of this forest. Sol, get up now."

“Huh? Okay!”

An-Sol, who hadn't participated in the conversation, hurriedly got up. It didn't seem like anyone was bothered by An-Hyun and I making the decisions. Their faces and the atmosphere seemed much better than when Park Dong-gul was here. In particular, Lee Yoo-Jung seemed pleased to know that Park Dong-gul might be suffering. I even saw a smile on her face.

Our group quickly headed down the hill.

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About 2 hours had passed since we first decided our escape route. The thick trees, that blocked out the sky, made the forest seem much darker than it had looked from the hill. We walked through the dark forest for 2 hours without rest. Along with every step, I heard the crunching sound that the dirt and grass made, along with the group's rhythmic breathing. An-Hyun and I led the group at the front.

The melancholy forest was quiet and appeared much bigger than I had originally thought. However, if my memory was correct, as long as we continued at this pace, we would be out of the forest by evening. I thought perhaps the angels had dropped us in the difficult forest because of our superior skill level.

First, we had to escape this forest before evening. The preparation room didn't supply any food or water, as it only had clothes and weapons.. There were separate areas with those

necessities. There was either a rest room or a save point to sleep one night. Other than that, we could steal from other players or loot a village store.

“Brother...”

“Yeah?”

An-Hyun and I were at the front while An-Sol and Kim Han-Byul followed closely behind. With Lee Yoo-Jung bringing up the rear, we were cautiously proceeding through the forest. Meanwhile, An-Sol pulled on An-Hyun’s shirt and embarrassingly mumbled, “I need to pee...”

“.....”

Everyone turned awkwardly at An-Sol’s timid words.

“Are you an idiot?”

Though she looked a bit dumb, this was a bit much. I couldn’t help but wonder how she made it in the real world.

An-Hyun stopped for a second and asked, “Can we stop for a moment? I think my sister needs some time.”

Fortunately, Lee Yoo-Jung and Kim Han-Byul kindly agreed. It seemed as if women could all relate to each other. An-Sol, who

looked afraid, pestered An-Hyun to go with her but he heartlessly sent her alone.

Lee Yoo-Jung, who was sitting on the ground, grinned slightly as An-Sol plodded away in defeat.

“Will she be okay? She could be attacked again.”

“Since I’m watching carefully it’ll be alright. I’m sure a 19 year old can use the bathroom by herself. Also, since you’re talking down to me, how old are you?”

“Me? 22. You’ve been talking down to me too. However aren’t you younger than me? Just by looking I can tell you’re 20 or 21.”

“I’m 22 too.”

“Eh? We’re the same age. How about we take this chance to properly introduce ourselves?”

Lee Yoo-Jung spoke in a much more cheerful voice and glanced at everybody. Kim Han-Byul seemed anxious, however whether it was from the from tiredness or increased tension, I didn’t know. He carefully sat down next to her. An-Hyun and I nodded at each other before taking our seats on the cold ground.

“Let’s be quick since we need to leave when my sister gets back. My name is An-Hyun. I’m 22 years old.”

“What did you do before you came here?”

An-Hyun scratched his cheek at Lee Yoo-Jung’s difficult question but gently replied, “I was just a neighborhood punk working part-time jobs. You?”

“Me? My name is Lee Yoo-Jung. I’m also 22. I took a break from school and focused on studying for my police entrance exams.”

Police entrance exams? Then her dream was to be a female police officer? For some reason, I could imagine Lee Yoo-Jung being in a police uniform. Then the two suddenly turned their attention towards me and Kim Han-Byul.

“Kim Han-Byul. I’m 21 years old and a college student.”

“Younger than me? What university?”

“Yonsei University.”

“Wow! You must be smart. I’m jealous.”

For a second they stared at her with admiration. Then they abruptly switched their gaze to me. Kim Han-Byul followed suit and looked at me expectantly. I felt awkward being stared at like that but I did my best to look composed.

“My name is Kim Soo-Hyun. I’m 23 years old. I was a soldier.”

“Someone who is older! Feel free to speak how you want. Were you in the army, air force, or navy?”

“Then you’re an older brother. Feel free to speak plainly to me too. What rank were you?”

Before, I thought she was strong-minded, but it seems Lee Yoo-Jung was actually a lively person. At the same time, An-Hyun seemed more interested after mentioning the military.

“I was an army sergeant.”

“Damn, if you had a little more time you could have been discharged from your service.”

Lee Yoo-Jung burst out laughing and I wryly smiled as I spoke again.

“I was discharged. I came here on the way back from turning in my discharge papers.”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

What’s this? Those pitying eyes. This pathetic atmosphere.

“Why are you all looking at me like that? I’m okay. It doesn’t matter. So please stop looking at me like that.”

Despite what I said, an awkward silence fell between us. An-Hyun turned his head and gave a fake cough while Lee Yoo-Jung just stared at me with a sympathetic face. To top it all off, even Kim Han-Byul looked at me with pity. It really wasn’t a big deal for me though.

To break the awkwardness, Lee Yoo-Jung changed the topic with a lively voice.

“I still feel like this is a dream. If this was a normal day, I would probably ditch studying to call my friends. We would go rest somewhere and chat all day, or get some delicious food. Then, on the way home, I would promise myself that I would study hard the next day. That’s how I would be living.”

Everyone’s expressions eased up after hearing those words. An-Hyun smiled and took part too.

“I would most likely be finishing my day working at the internet café. I’d catch a customer who tried to leave without paying. My damn boss would yell at me for not cleaning well enough. Then I would wait at some counter eating chicken, preparing to pick up

Sol. Hehe. Oh, what would you do at home, Soo-Hyun?”

“Me?”

I tilted my head at An-Hyun’s sudden question. Hmmm. It had been over 10 years so I couldn’t really remember. After thinking for a bit I just decided to answer normally.

“I’m not sure. I guess I’d take a deep breath and finally feel free again. I’d go home, see my mother, before giving my father a call. I’d eat my mom’s delicious food and take a nice hot bath. Then... Wait, why are you all looking at me like that? Don’t look at me like I’m some poor animal. I’m really okay.”

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An-Sol came back after finishing her business, and everything came to a close. She politely bowed and said, “I’m back.” I thought she was adorable. However, those words were a signal that thrust us back into the harsh reality. Introducing ourselves and chatting with one another took us away from the hell of our current situation, if only for a moment. An-Hyun sighed and reluctantly stood up.

After a rest, we continued walking through the dark forest. Although it seemed like An-Hyun and I were leading the way at the front, I was actually the one skillfully guiding our path. We hadn’t encountered any Deadmen because I was detecting our surroundings and carefully avoiding them.

However, we wouldn't be able to keep avoiding them. The closer we got to the outer edge of the forest, the more Deadmen there would be. The best I could do was to lead us towards the area with the least amount of Deadmen.

An-Sol worried me the most. Even if we went in the direction with the least amount of Deadmen, there was still a possibility of coming across dozens of them. If that happened, I was unsure if An-Sol would be able to remain calm. An-Hyun suddenly stood still and shouted.

“What’s wrong?”

“Shhh.”

Lee Yoo-Jung and I turned our heads in the direction An-Hyun was pointing and saw three Deadmen wandering around. They flared their nostrils and smacked their lips. I was sure they could smell us. I instinctively glanced at An-Sol and saw her put both hands on her mouth and tightly shut her eyes. At least one crisis was averted.

“Not only can they see and hear us, they can smell us too?”

“That’s what it seems like. Keep your heads down for now.”

An-Hyun quickly hid behind a large tree and took Sol into his arms. Lee Yoo-Jung, Kim Han-Byul, and I also hid ourselves and waited for the Deadmen to pass by. I saw An-Hyun firmly grasp his shield, but I shook my head at him. It was better to practice killing Deadmen after escaping the forest. I couldn't exactly remember

why, but I remembered other players at the Rite of Passage warning to never enter the forest.

According to my senses, we were about halfway through the forest. Even though we avoided the Deadmen up until now, if those three were killed there would be a higher chance we would be surrounded by more. If they received a signal and gathered around us, then there would be nowhere left to run.

Even if we got rid of them, it needed to be done all at once so they can't alert the others. But, with only stones and a shield, that wasn't a possibility. The longsword on my waist faintly rattled. I should have given it to An-Hyun earlier. As I was thinking this, the Deadmen snorted and slowly, step by step, moved closer towards our hiding places.

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TL Note:

Talking down refers to honorifics in the Korean language. People who are older are allowed to “shorten” their speech and talk down. People who are younger or strangers are expected to speak in honorifics.

When An-Hyun addresses Soo-Hyun, he calls him “hyung” which means older brother. “Hyung” can be used to address any older man whether or not they are blood-related. I used his name in place of “hyung” when it wasn't clear to the reader who he was talking to.

## Chapter 15 - Split In Half (5)

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The Deadmen continued to sniff and wander closer to us. They gave off a grotesque feeling, as their torn skin exposed their rotting facial bones. I could tell that the others were terrified of them. I didn't expect anything better, as it had only been a day since they had arrived here.

Growl. Growl.

The Deadmen's growls pierced through the otherwise silent forest. The Deadmen's movements were extremely slow and, because of that, I was sure that we hadn't been discovered. While watching them, I realised that for us to kill three Deadmen at once was nothing more than a dream.

Growl. Growl.

Every time a Deadman growled I could feel the trees shaking. Unsurprisingly, An-Sol was leaning against the tree, her body shaking.

Shoo, Shoo.

Deadmen didn't lift their feet when walking, so, with every step, a large amount of grass was torn up and dragged by them. Two Deadmen soon showed up right in-front of the tree. I looked at the others.

"The Deadmen are one step closer to us. When they move forward by one step, we need to move back by one. Remember, above all, keep silent."

This solution had the highest possibility of success, as the tree was quite large. However, the possibility of being found by a Deadmen was higher than the possibility of escape. Even so, it was better than nothing.

As we slowly fled backwards, the others mentally repeated the plan, as if it were a mantra.

‘One step closer. Move just as much as them.’

‘One step closer. Move just as much as them.’

‘One step closer. Move just as much as them.’

After several repetitions of this plan, I could see the Deadmen wandering around our previous position.

The surroundings were very quiet. After the Deadmen had finished wandering around, they let out a dissatisfied cry and then slowly made their way to the front again. Seeing the threat walk away, everyone was relieved, as they would be gone soon. However, suddenly...

Tak! Crunch!

“Hhppp!”

An-Sol, who was shaking and obviously terrified, had accidentally stepped on a small branch. Following that, as if to add insult to injury, she let out an ear-piercing scream. A scream as loud as that, a Deadman would obviously hear it. Finally... she had done it.

Growl! Growl! Growl!

The Deadmen starting heading towards our position, and its growls slowly became louder. The others were so shocked that they couldn’t move. The Deadmen’s footsteps gradually got faster and faster, before they finally stuck their head out . Okay, we’ve been busted.

“Kwaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Opp! Ahhhhhhhhh!”

The Deadmen lunged at us, showing their glistening red teeth. Eventually, An-So let out another scream. Luckily An-Hyun was covering her mouth with his hand, so it wasn’t as loud as it would’ve been. Nevertheless, I’m sure that the Deadmen still managed to hear it.

The fight against the Deadmen was growing increasingly dangerous. As I aimed my crossbow at the Deadmen, An-Hyun used his shield to defend himself and An-Sol. Soon after, a Deadmen collided into the shield that An-Hyun was holding.

Koong!

Moments later, I heard a terrible crash. I turned my head to see An-Hyun reeling back from the collision. Luckily he was able to defend himself and An-Sol from the Deadmen. However, it was ineffective, as he had to protect An-Sol with his right hand. I pulled the crossbow's trigger, but, before I did, some thoughts flashed through my mind. I changed my aim to the Deadman's heart, rather than his head.

"It's not enough with just one or two shots."

The second arrow penetrated the Deadmen's chest with a 'PING' sound. While the Deadmen was still reeling from the shock, I quickly pulled the longsword from my waist.

"An-Hyun, catch the sword, and pass An-Sol to me."

An-Hyun pushed away An-Sol to where I am, and raised his right hand. Then, bitted his lips as he was preparing to fight with the Deadmen.

"Please take good care of her!"

Almost as soon as he finished talking the Deadman ran straight at him. The Deadman repeatedly collided into An-Hyun's shield, and, as a result, he was pushed back several steps. However, he forcefully pushed An-Sol safely to my side. As soon as she arrived in my arms, I threw the sword in his direction. An-Sol caught the longsword and continued fighting. Suddenly, I heard Lee Yoo-Jung and Kim Han-Byul urgently scream at me.

"Hey, behind you!"

"Watch your back!"

“I know it.”

When I glanced behind me, I could see the Deadman, who had gone in a different direction earlier, running towards me from behind. However, I knew I had been well out of their range of detection. In just two seconds, I lifted my crossbow, aimed it at its forehead and pulled the trigger.

PUK!

I was dead-on this time, and my arrow easily penetrated the Deadman's forehead.

“Huuuu....uuuunnn....ngggggg...”

An-Sol's hysteric and immature behaviour usually annoyed me every time, but not this time. When I saw An-Sol crying and shedding tears in my arm, my heart broke. So, I petted her and tried to comfort her.

“It'll be alright.” I whispered.

After I said that, her shivering started to disappear.

Even though An-Hyun was equipped with a longsword and shield, his eyes were full of fear. However, he had moved past his fear. It showed that he was finally facing up to the reality. That very attitude was what I was expecting from An-Hyun and the others. An-Hyun's moral force had just begun to awaken.

An-Hyun raised his shield to his chest, which was a better way to fight, as he didn't have a lot of experience. I even remembered a quote for this, “The best defense is a good offense.”

Kooong! Kuadeuk!

This time his attacked seemed quite powerful, as I could even hear something break from the collision. I took a closer look, and saw that the Deadman's chest was badly dented. When I saw An-Hyun raising his longsword and preparing for a counter attack, I decided to give him some advice.

“Aim for the head. Their head is their weakness.”

He listened to my advice and swung his longsword at the Deadman's head. Although his posture seemed naïve, the Deadman's head split apart anyways.

The fate for the following Deadman wasn't any better. An-Hyun defended himself from the Deadman's attack, before running into it with the shield. When the Deadman fell unconscious, he finished it off with his sword. The Deadman's body started to collapse and fall apart soon after An-Hyun's last attack. It looked like he was confused, as there was a vacant look on his face.

After killing all of the Deadmen, everyone let out a ragged breath. ‘Defend with the shield and attack with the sword’. Although seemingly simple, what An-Hyun had done wasn't something that anyone could do. If these Deadmen had targeted a different person, then the end result may not have been the same. Whoever it was, they couldn't do the same thing An-Hyun did.

An-Hyun's arm fell limp by his side, and he let out a heavy breath.

“Huuughh... Huuuuughhh... I didn't expect it to be so difficult to fight the Deadmen by throwing rocks at them.”

“Of course. It was a life-threatening situation, after all. However, you did well maintaining yourself and not losing your calm.”

After saying that, I felt that something small was wriggling in my arms. Realizing it was An-Sol, I looked down, and released her. When freed, An-Sol sprinted to An-Hyun to check his condition.

“Brother... Are you okay?”

“I feel fine. I don't have any injuries.”

“Ugh... Ugghhhh.... Sorry....”

“It's alright, don't cry.”

An-Sol shed tears like a waterfall, knowing that her brother was in danger because of her. It didn't look like she would ever stop, even though An-Hyun soothed her. Lee Yoo-Jung walked towards us, showing relief on her face, before slapping An-Hyun on his back.

“Hey, you saved me. Better than I expected, huh?”

“Nah. I would've been in a big trouble if Su-Hyun hadn't lent me his longsword. Oh, hey. Here's your longsword back.”

He looked at me with a sorrowful face, however when I refused to take it back, his face immediately brightened.

“I think it's better for you to keep the longsword.”

“Oh my god. Are you serious?”

“Yeah~. He already has a crossbow. Anyways, have you ever done Kendo before?”

An-Hyun gave a bow of gratitude. When I saw An-Hyun and Lee Yoo-Jung chatting, I smiled.

Just a moment ago, I had aimed my crossbow at the Deadman's forehead, but I intentionally re-aimed it at its chest.

“I think it's alright.....”

“Wait a minute.”

At that moment, Kim Han-Byul, who had made the Deadmen hesitate by throwing a rock at them, spoke. Her face showed her anxiousness. I was curious as to what words would come out of her mouth.

“At the empty lot.... Didn't the Deadmen gather after we had killed one of them?”

“Is that right...?”

As soon as Lee Yoo-Jung bitterly asked her question, everyone turned pale. An-Sol looked especially bad, almost as if she was on

the verge of a panic attack. An-Hyun petted her and said,

“Hey, let’s escape from here.”

“Ah, okay. Then should we make our way in the opposite direction of where those Deadmen came from?”

“Hmmm... no. We’ll continue on our way in the same way as before. If we change directions now, we might have to stay the night in this forest.”

Admiringly, An-Hyun was trying to escape from the forest before nightfall. If An-Hyun and I were in teacher-student relations, I would’ve petted him. However, I was satisfied with just nodding my head at him. Even though, I could perceive several Deadmen on the way out, his plan was the best solution.

After resting for a moment, we quickly continued on our way.

## Chapter 16 - Split In Half (6)

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I probably mentioned this before, but in ‘Hall Plain,’ Deadmen weren’t even considered monsters. To call it an ability is a bit much, but all they had was the ability to infect others, along with a little intellect. Any healthy man with a steel pipe would have over a 80% chance of dealing with a Deadman. (Of course we have to assume it is one-on-one, and that the man is able to think normally.)

An-Hyun was equipped with a longsword and shield, and had basic Strength points. If he kept a strong resolve and learned to use his weapon, he would be able to grow much more. He’d easily be able to take care of a Deadman.

Once he had a chance to act, all his hesitation disappeared. An-Hyun was a clever and natural fighter. However, as he focused on defending and trying to counterattack the Deadmen, there was a hint of insecurity.. With more confidence, he would be able to take on three or four of them without any difficulty.

After breaking through the front, we quickly headed towards the forest’s edge. Along the way, Kim Han-Byul discovered the traces of a trail. We decided to follow it out of the woods. Our group naturally started to move faster. However, it was inevitable that the further we went the more Deadmen would appear. In order to get more battle experience, An-Hyun was in charge of most of the fights.

Four Deadmen, having smelt humans, opened their mouths and let out a screech. An-Hyun’s eyes were full of confidence and

slowly seemed to reveal his aggressiveness. Seeing An-Hyun pick up his sword and shield, An-Sol spoke in a mosquito-like voice.

“Brother...Be careful...”

“Okay. Hang in there. Soo-Hyun, can you protect Sol and the others?”

“Don’t worry about the kids. I’ll keep them safe.”

“Who are you calling kids!?” exclaimed Lee-Yoo-Jung.

An-Hyun briefly chuckled and, with a momentum that could be described as rough and fierce, swiftly ran in. Although earlier two had been dealt with at the same time, this was the first time attempting four. I put a bolt in my crossbow and prepared for any accidents.

He watched his movements carefully, and, when he was about a meter away, he took a step diagonally. The step maneuvered him to the left of the oncoming rush of monsters. Unlike a human’s body, a monster’s wasn’t flexible at all.. The Deadman who was rushing to bite him was forced to stop because of his hardened joints. The sword pierced through the vulnerable gap in the side of its head. One down, three to go. At the same time, he removed the sword and faced the remaining Deadmen

Looking at An-Hyun, I felt that reality he grasped the reality of his attacks quite well. Above all, it is about aiming for the

weaknesses of your opponent, rather than a simple attack and defense. I wanted to praise him for knowing that Deadmen were vulnerable to rotating, as well as exploiting that by moving diagonally.

There was a crushing sound, and a Deadman took a few steps back. Deadmen could only attack by biting with their teeth.. When striking with a shield, it was more efficient, as well as safer, to hold it above your chest.. Nobody had taught An-Hyun this yet, however he was doing exactly that. Looking at the Deadman's restless teeth, An-Hyun's sword thrust forward like a meteor. I silently exclaimed to myself that the second was gone.

Now that two had gone and kicked the bucket, only half were left. Perhaps because he dealt with the first two so effortlessly, the shield on his left hand was held a bit looser. In an effort to bite something, one of them lunged forwards. Without moving, An-Hyun carefully observed and clutched the handle of his longsword with an inverted grip. My eyes opened wide. No way, could it be a one-handed sword skill....?"

Calculate the range of the sword swing and control the timing. I knew the principles because I was quite a master at it myself. The gaping Deadman came into range. Simultaneously, I could see An-Hyun grasp the longsword and firmly place power into it. Now is the time.

Suk!

The ghastly sound of flesh splitting echoed throughout the forest. Although the execution was a bit sloppy, an exquisite

crescent shaped cut had appeared down the center of the Deadman's head. Something similar to delight emerged on An-Hyun's face. For the first time since that battle had started, I frowned. . There was still one monster remaining.

As soon as the deadman in the front collapsed, the remaining monster immediately took An-Hyun by surprise. It was good that he had quick reactions, and brought up his shield in time. However, because of his loose grip, he wouldn't be able to win against the advancing Deadman's strength. I watched the two clash as I quickly aimed my loaded crossbow.

Thud!

“Keuk!”

As expected, An-Hyun eventually lost control of his shield. Unlike the Deadman he had blocked earlier, this one only collided with his left arm. His hands were most likely shaking by now. In any case, An-Hyun's front side was defenseless after the collision and the Deadman wouldn't miss this opportunity. Like a snake, its teeth lunged towards his chest. . As soon as I saw this, I let loose a bolt.

‘I'm sorry, but he's too valuable to become your food.’

The bolt flashed, and with a sharp noise, pierced straight into the Deadman's head. Luckily, just as he was about to bite into An-Hyun's neck, the bolt hit. He looked scared to death as he dropped down to the ground.

“Whew...”

“Nice shot, boss.”

I wasn't sure if she knew how dangerous the situation just was, but Lee Yoo-Jung looked at me and tossed a joke. Even if An-Hyun did well, I couldn't read his future. Of course he had done enough for now, however that may just be my greed wanting more from him. An-Hyun stared blankly and stroked his own neck, before looking at me and speaking to me in a relieved voice.

“I'm alive thanks to you. Thank you, brother.”

“Heh. I only helped with one. You did well.”

An-Hyun shook his head at my idle remark, and muttered to himself in disbelief.

“I had no idea it would attack like that. If it wasn't for your shot, earlier....”

I snuck a glance at An-Sol's face and saw that she was on the verge of tears. After seeing An-Sol trembling as if she didn't want to hear anymore, An-Hyun saved his breath.

“It couldn't be helped. The moment you dashed in was excellent. In that case I would support...”

“Waaaah!”

Unable to hold it in any longer, An-Sol burst into tears and rushed to her brother. The siblings made me want to cry. Feeling awkward, I unfastened my loaded crossbow and put the bolts back into my bag. Looking at the two, Lee Yoo-Jung spoke in a slightly envious voice.

“Maybe it’s because I was just watching but I could have probably done it too....shit. I should have chosen a weapon too. Han-Byul. Do you have a weapon?”

At Lee Yoo-Jung’s words, Kim Han-Byul rummaged around and brought out a short sword. Unless thrown, it was hardly a useful weapon, as it needed to be used in close quarters to land an effective blow. Although, in the hands of a master like me, it’d be a different story. But if a normal person wielded it, the risk of injuring themselves would be high.

“It doesn’t look like it’ll be much help. Why are you carrying it around?”

“Just in case. It would be better to kill myself than suffer unnecessarily.”

“...Do you think you’re some kind of Chosun dynasty girl...?”

Lee Yoo-Jung shook her head with a horrified look towards Kim

Han-Byul. She couldn't help but think that her voice was too calm. Suddenly, she stared at my crossbow with covetous eyes, however she directed her gaze elsewhere when she realized she didn't know how to use it. She grumbled with a disappointed face.

“Where's the iron pipe that punk was holding? Han-Byul, see if there's anything around.”

“There's nothing.”

Seemingly, Kim Han-Byul looked uncomfortable because of Lee Yoo-Jung talking to her as she pleased. All of a sudden, Park Dong-gul's group came to mind. Compared to my previous Rite of Passage, we were having a really easy time. In those days... the first two days were just constantly running away. What were they are doing now? Were they on the run? No, Perhaps they're already in a Deadman's belly, cut into a bunch of small pieces.

Of course it wasn't my problem, so I just erased it from my memories. Whether it was the aftermath of the battle, or the consolation of An-Sol, An-Hyun came to us with a bit of strength.

“Brother, it looks like the traces of the trail are getting clearer. Since it seems we're almost there how about moving along?”

“Sure. Let's do that.”

Lee Yoo-Jung overheard my conversation with An-Hyun. Maybe it was because she was angry that she didn't have a weapon but she

started to pout.

“Pffft. Excited, aren’t we? Be careful or you might just get killed.”

“I don’t want to stay here and be eaten. It’s better this way. Anyways, let’s hurry down.”

“I know, I know. I’m sick of this forest too. I want to hurry and leave this place.”

That’s how after getting rid of the four Deadmen, we quickly followed the road down again. I was sure this was the path leading out of the forest. However, the amount of Deadmen on the outskirts of the city worried me.. I could sense just over 20 of them. However, even if we went in the other direction, it wouldn’t make much of a difference.

The difference between dealing with four and twenty could be compared to the distance between heaven and earth.. If so, apart from a frontal attack, there was only one way to escape. I sighed to myself and thought of what I could say to persuade the others.

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As expected, the outskirts of the forest was swarming with Deadmen. A brief glance showed that there were more than twenty of them in every direction. We were only seeing the ones in the front, but, even then, with one small noise the monsters would pop out, left and right. There would be far too many to ignore.

In the distance, I could see stone walls that carried traces of people. Beyond that, though it was rugged, I could make out the edge of something that resembled a road. One more step and we would be out of this forest. The others must have realized this fact, and started to tense up. No matter how good An-Hyun was, there was no way he could deal with over twenty Deadmen. Nevertheless, I hesitated to retreat from here.

“This is crazy... how can we break through that...?”

Lee Yoo-Jung’s hollow voice pierced everyone’s ears. There was no guarantee that if we turned around and went another way it would be any different. An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byul were also at a loss for words, and silently stared at the ground. In the end, there was only that one way. I let out a short sigh and decided to give it a try.

“I have a good idea.”

As soon as they heard my words, it seemed like everyone’s ears pricked up. I decided to get right to the point.

## Chapter 17 - Split in Half (7)

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“Lure. We are going to lure them out.”

“What? We are going to lure those monsters?”

Similar, but slightly out of context. I shook my head uneasily. Everyone watched me with blank eyes, but Kim Han-Byeol seemed to roughly understand me when she raised her eyebrows. Anyway, it seemed necessary to explain a little more.

“No. Rather than luring them out, it's one of us becoming bait for these monsters.”

I stopped for a moment and pointed my finger towards the forest. I spoke as I watched everyone's gaze turn back into the forest.

“If you make a commotion, the monsters will surely run towards the bait. If we maintain the aggro we can lure them into that forest. Afterwards the party can cross through the gap and climb over the wall. Then we will be out of the forest.”

On purpose, I spoke with a hopeful tone that we could escape the forest but everyone's face turned sceptical. It was not a positive response. They were not happy by any means. Nevertheless, as they had nothings to say, they must have all thought it was a valid plan. Of course, there was one essential problem in finalising this plan.

It was obvious, the thought on everyone's mind. Who would be the bait? If those Deadmans walked slowly like Zombies, it might be doable. But once a Deadman finds a prey, they start sprinting. At just one moment of hesitation, the person acting as bait would be instantly surrounded and become food.

For a while, everyone just looked at each other. Again, it was the fast thinking Kim Han-Byeol that asked the main point.

“This means that one person has to sacrifice himself, isn't it?”

“Of course.”

“Who will do it?”

Silence. With the end of the forest in sight, anyone would hesitate in this situation. I already had considered such thoughts, and with a light sigh, I lifted my hand. I would feel the lot more comfortable doing it myself, rather than letting someone else doing this hard task.

“The person who came up with it should do it. So I will do it.”

“Absolutely not. It's too dangerous.”

“Oppa. Han-Byeol is right. Let's just hide a while longer. Un?”

Kim Han-Byeol instantly was opposed to the plan, with Lee Yu-

Jung trying to persuade me otherwise. Still, this much was within expectation so I presented them with my answers I prepared beforehand.

“We can’t wait forever. We don’t know when those things could find us.”

“We could always head out to a different direction.”

It was Kim Han-Byeol again refuting me. I shook my head, as I told them my rebuttal.

“Moving will take time and it's almost evening. If we want to escape, this is the last chance.”

“But....”

Kim Han-Byeol still seemed sceptical, so I spoke with more force than usual. Of course, I still remembered the discomfort on Kim Han-Byeol’s face when Lee Yu-Jung spoke impolitely, so I had yet to talk to her.

“If there is no opening, we have to make one. There is no guarantee the situation would improve if we move to another area.”

Seeing no way to refute this, Kim Han-Byeol closed her mouth with a heavy scowl. There was a moment of silence. I am sure they felt relieved at the fact that they didn’t have to act as bait, with one

part feeling sorry for me. This was the difference between them and Park Don-Gul.

Park Don-Gul had called this hypocrisy. If we had the same conversation this moment, I am sure Park Don-Gul and I would have similar thoughts, to a point. The past me would make a show, telling everyone to stop trembling but right now this party needed a silent Hyung who always had their back. If Park Don-Gul could have controlled himself, or if he had some use, I wouldn't have sent him away like that. I chuckled at myself at this impossible dream.

“Then.... Ah.... Su-Hyun Oppa will be in danger.”

When I turned my head, An-Sol was mumbling with a red face. Was she worrying about me?

I wanted to kiss her admirable heart, but An-Hyun was just an arm's length away so I was satisfied with just smiling at her. I spoke while pretended to look around and alert.

“We can't just throw away this chance to escape the forest. I always thought a time will come when we have to put up with this much danger. That time just came earlier than expected. That's all.”

“But...”

“It's laughable that a twenty-three year old like me will talk about this, but I'm the oldest here. If I don't volunteer here, when else would I be able to?”

An-Sol's face seemed to be a little brighter as I spoke cheekily. An-Hyun, who kept silent until then, opened his mouth for the first time. It was a face of resolve after thinking about something deeply.

“Hyung.”

“Hmm?”

“That time when we faced the monsters. They usually walk around, but when they find a person, it's like they start running. There is a chance you will get caught acting as bait.”

“Even then, it looks to me like they were just walking faster. I’m confident that I won’t get caught when I run at full speed. I just need to think of it like the usual run we do during the morning roll call.

“Even though if we manage to escape...b..ut.. Oppa .... Later... How will you escape?”

Kim Han-Byeol, who was silently listening on, tacked on an utterance. Why is she like this all of a sudden? This she just called me an Oppa just now? Did I mishear? Tilting my head, I retorted.

“I will figure something out when I get there. Anyways, I think this is the only way. Han-Byeol, and everyone, I am only thinking about how all of you can leave this forest right now.”

“Then let’s do it together Hyung. We can’t let Hyung do everything. I shall go with.”

He should just stay where he is. As An-Sol’s eye became wide and grabbed tightly onto An-Hyun cloth. With an exaggerated expression, I gave a loud sigh and spoke to An-Hyun.

“No. You have to go with everyone.”

“Why? Hyung doesn’t need to face the dangers alone.”

“You never know if those things are beyond the wall. We need one person to protect the party just in case. Also, it’s better for just one person to act as bait.”

“Still....”

“And you have a sister.”

When I mentioned An-Sol, An-Hyun immediately shut up. An-Sol was looking at me with a complicated expression. Gratitude. Worry. Remorse. Usually, I hate kids like An-Sol, but strangely enough, she wasn’t as detestable.

After some time had passed, An-Hyun nodded his head with some effort.

“... I got it. I leave it to you Hyung.”

“Of course, I want to live as well. Just have faith.”

“Yes. I will.”

“Trust me. There is no time like the present, so I am going to head off now. Everyone, keep low. When you think I have lured them far away, Hyun you lead the party and run. Never look back. Don't be foolish and look backwards. Just look straight forward and run. Understand?”

The women had nothing to say. Everyone had mixed feelings on their face. Relief that they might just live, mixed with the guilt that they didn't stand up to act as bait. When I was loading the crossbow to prepare myself and head out, I could hear Kim Han-Byeol, Lee Yu-Jung and An-Sol say their one piece.

“... I am sorry.”

“Oppa... Thank you. Please don't die.”

“Be safe....”

At their heartfelt worry, I responded with a strong voice.

“Good Luck.”

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I moved off immediately. Of course, it didn't mean that I started off making a ruckus as soon as I came out of hiding. If I started making noise right now, we could be unlucky and the party could be caught as well. I looked around quickly and saw a boulder on the uphill. If I climbed it, I could observe the situation and all the Deadmans will be able to find me. There were no tree with much girth, but if I was alone, it was enough for me to hide and move undetected.

Keeping as low as possible, I moved from tree to tree. I tried my best to keep my breathing and footsteps as quiet as possible as I moved undetected. I had plenty of experience in stealth, so it wasn't difficult. In that moment, I remembered my first time in the Rite of Passage.

In the clearing, Park Don-Gul and Lee Yu-Jung was fighting, and the rock he kicks brought a swarm of Deadman. At that time, I tried to survive alone and escaped alone. I didn't even manage to get a proper direction as I floundered in the forest for two days, trying to flee. It was laughable comparing then and now.

I could have been more composed. There might have been another way. Those regrets suddenly floated up.

Reduced my breathing, and deaden my footstep. In this state, I steadily moved from tree to tree, avoiding detection. The boulder as my target, though it wasn't tall, the rock was round so the Deadman would not be able to climb so easily. I also thought that I might see a village or buildings beyond the wall at that height.

I moved through about twenty trees, and not once was I detected. In not time, I had arrived in front of the boulder and gave a quick glance at my surroundings before prompting climbing it. With the open view, I could clearly see the situation below. Unfortunately, there were no village or buildings beyond the stone wall. However, that wasn't much of a concern as I would find them as I head to the centre.

I thought it was a good thing that I gave up on a full frontal charge. The judgement made through magical sense was not off its mark. Seeing all the Deadman in the surroundings, I slowly stood up atop the boulder. Looking at the side where the party was hidden, An-Hyun's head peeking up as if looking for the perfect timing. From now on, I had to be the perfect bait for everyone. I exchanged a look with Hyun and took a deep breath.

And with all my strength, I screamed out loudly.

“Ah ah ah ah ah ah!”

My voice rang loudly all around. The effect was immediate. Literally in an instant. All of the Deadman down below turned their heads toward me. Before long they all cried out and I could see them run towards me. Step one was a success, but there was no sense of lacking.

More and more Deadman were coming out of the forest as I vigorously swung both my arms and made a loud noise provoking them. To draw in all the Deadman on the far right side, I had to

hold on for a while on the boulder. I cried out again.

“Wah ah ah ah ah! Monsters!!!! I AM HERE! Come look here!”

Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung.  
Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung.

As soon as my shout ended, I could hear their cries multiply. At the same time, I could feel the monsters moving towards me in mass. The Deadman closest to me had already reached the boulder I was on and was struggling to climb it. It looked like it didn't need to scream anymore. As if they were starving for prey, the Deadman screeched as they came running towards me.

I somberly spat out, “This reminds me of old times.”

I bore a dark smile towards the approaching monsters. I lifted the crossbow on my left hand and took out 3 arrows. The crossbow I had on hand now could load up to three arrows at once. Once loaded, it could fire three arrows.

Before aiming at the forehead of the struggling Deadman in front of me, I looked once again at the place the party was hiding. Strangely enough, I could not stop laughing.

## Chapter 18 - Split In Half (8)

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Numerous Deadman corpses littered the ground in front of the pile of rocks. I counted about 7, 9 arrows embedded on each of their foreheads. However, there was still many more Deadmans to dispose of. Seeing them stepping on their fallen comrades to get to me, it was like they really want to take a bite out of me.

“They are trying hard, really hard.”

Humming to myself, I let my hand reach into the arrow pouch for more, but I couldn't feel anything. In the dark pouch, I only stirred the air inside before managing to scrape 2 arrows from the very bottom. I should really collect the spent arrows on my way back.

So far, not all the Deadmans have gathered yet. I could still see more Deadman in the distance, huffing and puffing to get to me, but I thought this was enough and it was time to leave. Even if three of four of the beasts were left to harass the party, An-Hyun will be more than be able to handle it.

Yet looking below, there were still Deadman with their mouth wide open, shaking their head as they howled ceaselessly. The sight was so funny, that I unconsciously copied its movement.

‘What am I doing right now?’

I reflexively covered my mouth, trying to cover my laughter at these things.

I think I am too restless. After I became a Sword Master during my first time in Hall Plain, I was emotionally dead inside. Especially before a battle, I tried to stay as cold as ice. Maybe that's why in the most difficult battle that could be chosen, the Retaking of Atlanta and the Ragnarok Annihilation, I managed to survive.

Really, it has been ages since I felt like this. The me who did not even blink in the face of the overwhelming strength of combined forces was being swayed by this slaughter. Even now I couldn't seem to control my emotions. It was not an unfavourable situation like back then, but this restless anticipation was melting all over me.

The more that I gazed at the monsters on top of the pile of rocks, the more it seems to spur my emotions that I jumped down and leapt toward the forest. These Deadmans were patiently throwing their bodies and groaned their way to the top when I jumped off they howled in anger at having climbed for nothing.

“Guys. There are too many eyes to finish this work here. So let us go a bit deeper into the forest.”

Gureurung!

I don't know if they understood what I said, but the Deadmans followed with a loud shriek.

I intentionally slowed my speed as I headed inside the forest. The original plan was to run at full speed and create a distance between

them, but I changed my mind. I made it so that now they would keep up and would be able to follow me.

Seems like they were a bit starved as these Deadmans dropped down from the pile of rocks with a thud. I shot my crossbow at them. Those Deadmans that climbed the pile of rocks with such effort was shot dead without satisfying their hunger.

Checking their slouched head, I immediately turned and walked towards the forest.

Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung! Gureurung!

Having heard this howl enough times now, I think I have gotten used to it. I controlled my tempo to seem just out of reach, making for a mortifying sight. The sounds of teeth clattering just behind me made for a novel thrill. Then.

Pak!

“Uh.”

I think I was a bit excessive with my merriment. Having been moving in an S for a while nonstop between the trees, I suddenly felt something bite tightly on my left arm. Shocked, I lifted my left arm and saw a Deadman making a strange face as it bit into my arm. This couldn't have been one of the bastards I dragged with me. Rather, it must have been one that was sauntering in the area and got lucky enough to sink his teeth in.

Truthfully, it wasn't painful. Rather, the shock of being bitten by this thing was greater. That shock was quickly converted to anger. The thing was lucky, but still, it damaged my pride. With a petulant voice, I spoke to the Deadman that bit my arm.

“What are you looking at.”

Gureurung.

“I was surprised.... You fuck.”

The Deadman that was biting on my wrist had an uncomprehending look in its eye. It was because even if it had bit me, its teeth hadn't sunk into the flesh. Wasn't this obvious. My Resistance Attribute was 92 points, did it think it could gnaw on my flesh? With profanity and anger, its head exploded as I slammed my right hand into it.

While I was wrangling with the beast, those Deadmans that were gasping at my heel had me surrounded. Few of these things grin at the thought that they had caught their prey. Having judged that I had run a reasonable distance from the pile of rocks, I flexed my wrist.

Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung. Gureurung.  
Gureurung. Gureurung.

Howling filled the air around me, but I had no fear. Having fallen

to the depth of hell before, these things were cute compared to the Hell Lions I tussled with. I merely desired and desired, that these things might sate my urge.

“I will be in your care.”

As I gave them a friendly greeting, the Deadmans' bared their teeth in response. Looks like these things didn't know basic manners. The Deadmans and I acted at the same time. I did nothing but simply stretching my fingers at the head of the Deadman, who were pushing to get at me. Right, let me get the first bastard that's in front.

Kaw!

How to describe the sensation of fingers piercing through the head, well, it's not like a person's soft flesh but more like piercing through a rotten log. Lifting Deadman that I pierced to the back of its head, it dangled on my fingers before it's body collapsed. Having witnessed such scene, the Deadman stopped completely for a moment.

Fear. Would these monsters that always preyed on humans know fear? That they themselves could be hunted. I happened on an epiphany. Do these things run on instinct or have some higher mentality? These bastards that ran mindlessly whenever they chanced on a prey, had momentarily stopped at the presence I was exuding.

Commendable, but I wasn't about to let them off. Lightly

releasing magic on my hand, the monster's head shattered completely. I motioned with my fingers, signalling them to attack. However, the Deadmans took a step back.

I wasn't even going to use my long sword. I wouldn't have any problem without it. I could immediately break off a branch or pick up a blade of grass and turn it into a deadly weapon. But I was thirsty for a slaughter and to relieve the thirst, I want to feel it with my bare hands. Cracking my knuckles, and grinned. A thought passed by. I think I finally realised why I couldn't stop laughing.

I was suppressing my nature. Living by the sword for 10 years in order to survive, and repeatedly killing things seems to have bathed my character in blood. My mouth twisted as I saw these monsters slowly moving back.

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“Hyung will pull through for us. Everyone get up, let's jump the wall quickly.”

The forest that was prowling with monsters now became deceitfully quiet. Looking at the quiet forest, An-Hyun spoke with a spirited voice, however, the mood of the party had sunk. As An-Hyun stated, it looked like Kim Su-Hyun had successfully dragged these things with him. Just now, it had been swarming with them, but now, not a peep could be seen of these monsters. Apart from that, it seems like everyone was wrapped in hopelessness.

“Oppa.... Will he be alright? You know. We could right now....”

As Lee Yu-Jung spoke with a dead voice, An-Hyun felt prickly inside. But he could not show that. Su-Hyun had put his faith in him and told him to protect the party. He couldn't betray that trust.

“We can't. Stop saying nonsense and get up. What are we going to do if those things come back?”

“Aren't you worried about Oppa?”

“I trust Hyung to pull through. He said it didn't he, that he will definitely come back so don't do anything stupid.”

Seeing An-Hyun reply confidently, Lee Yu-Jung closed her mouth. But seeing her devoid of energy, An-Hyun also felt helpless. However, he shook it off continued off with a comforting and strong voice.

“Let's believe. I am going to believe in Hyung, who believes in us.”

Having finished saying his piece, An-Hyun stepped out and observed the surrounding. Fortunately, he could not see even one Deadman. As An-Sol cautiously followed suit, and Lee Yu-Jung stood up seeing no other choice. Just as Lee Yu-Jung was about to leave the hideout, she tapped on Kim Han-Byeol's shoulder.

“Ya. Wake up. Why are you suddenly zoning out?”

”.....”

Kim Han-Byeol had no answer. With a cold look on her, she looked at Lee Yu-Jung once and slowly got up. Having checked that everyone had come out of the hiding place, An-Hyun spoke as he looked to the stone wall.

“Everyone, cheer up. After we climb that wall, we are out of this dreadful forest. For now, we will move as one until we reach the wall. I will climb first as we don’t know what could be on the other side.”

An-Sol and Lee Yu-Jung looked uneasy as they nodded their heads At An-Hyun's words. But Kim Han-Byeol was still tight-lipped. She was still staring at the forest that Kim Su-Hyun disappeared into. As if she felt An-Hyun's blank stare she immediately turned her head and spoke.

“I understand”

What does she understand? An-Hyun held a deep sigh in his heart he didn’t show outwardly. When Hyung was here, everyone helped each other and moved well, but now that he was gone, things were unconsciously falling apart from the start.

“.... It’s not like I don’t understand your concerns. It’s the same for me. But if we go into the forest, than Hyung’s sacrifice would

be in vain. Su-Hyun created this opportunity for us with his life. And Hyung asked me to keep you all safe. The only thing we can do now is to quickly jump over that wall and wait for Hyung's safe return. Everyone come to your senses!"

Even after all those words, the heavy mood did not improve. A lie seen through once could not be covered up as easily.

Everyone knew that An-Hyun was trying his best, but they had all shut their mouth. The more The more An-Hyun tried to encourage everyone the more he realised how large Kim Su-Hyun's presence was. A feeling of uneasiness that he did not know was slowly blooming up. An-Hyun finally closed his eyes in resignation.

The remainder of the party all remembered a composed man with a crossbow. It had only been half a day since they met, but he already had a place in their heart.

It was Kim Su-Hyun, who acted blazingly fast in the clearing, who saved the naive An-Sol from getting bitten by the monster. When the team was in danger of being divided by Park Dong-Gul. Fighting off the monster, and firing off his arrow in every dangerous situation. He was no different than a strong support that held up the fence in every importation situation

However, that fence was now gone. They didn't know if he would ever come back. The survivors could all feel the emptiness that was left behind by him.

# Chapter 19 - Momentary Separation (1)

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Puk! Pak!

Thud.

I leaned onto the tree after I destroyed the head of the very last Deadman. Deadmen, whose heads had been obliterated, now filled the area.

I tried my best to prolong the fight as much as possible, but it had ended way too quickly. It was just a one-sided massacre, and I wasn't satisfied. Rather than relieving my tension, it just left an ugly taste in my mouth.

Spit.

I spat at the wreck in front of me. I didn't know if my nature was being mutinous at having forcefully suppressed my desire for wanton slaughter, as it seemed to have reared its ugly head. I felt increasingly frustrated in my heart. I took a deep breath to calm myself, but it felt like I was just fanning it bigger. I suddenly realized that I might have never wanted to block these feelings in the first place.

“Filth. What a joke, this just ruins my appetite. ”

Smacking my lips for a while, I couldn't beat down the rising bloodlust within and smashed the tree next to me.

Bang! Usususu.

Without using any magic power, but just with pure muscle strength, the tree collapsed with a heavy sound. This relieved some tension, but the bloodlust within me didn't wash away completely.

The party must have escaped by now. I really wanted to burn down this whole forest right now, but I forcefully calmed myself down. You never knew if there were other monsters over the stone wall. I couldn't afford to waste time if I wanted to collect the arrows and worry about the guys.

Well, there was no one looking anyway. I gathered the magic I had left alone till now and moved my feet.

Trees, forests and the scenery quickly grazed past me. Putting the time I spent coming here to shame, I returned back to the pile of rock I was at before.

While I was picking out the arrows stuck to Deadmen's foreheads, I didn't see any hints of my party. As planned, they seemed to have left immediately after I entered the forest.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.... This much should be plenty."

Even though I wanted to put the arrows straight into my pouch, I quickly shook off the foreign substance from the arrows, as An-sol

might throw a fit if she saw them like that.

‘Time to head out.’

I didn’t know if An-Hyun and the party were still outside, so I walked slowly. Before I jumped over the wall, I turned back and looked at the silent forest for one last time.

The forest was still the same. Before and now, the trees still looked no different. I had no such thoughts when I was escaping the forest in the past. I just kept on running in the past, and it had felt like I had left the forest in a blink of an eye.

However, I was now different from back then. I absentmindedly watched the forest for a while. I began to feel lighter as if a huge burden was lifted from me.

After I enjoyed a short sentimental break, I jumped over the wall. I wanted this deep unsatisfying feeling to disappear. I had other important things to worry about.

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After I nimbly jumped over the stone wall, the scene I saw was beyond, way beyond my expectation. The road I was on right now was bumpy, but there was evidence of that it was made by the hands of people. At first glance, it wasn’t easy to see it, but there were shapes on the rough sides of the road.

A vast horizon of an endless plain awaited at the start of the road. The surroundings were dull. Every now and then, a soft wind would blow to bring some life into the scene.

Even when I rubbed my eyes, I didn't see any monsters. Unfortunately, I didn't see my party either. No matter where I looked, even when I used my magic, I didn't find a single hint of their whereabouts. I suddenly thought that they might have just abandoned me.

It wasn't possible to simply judge on their propensity, though.

When there were 3 or more tall, linear shapes in the surrounding, the greater the chance of being ambushed. However, I couldn't just base that on just a simple predisposition.

If I put the worry that they had abandoned me away, then it was most likely that they were waiting for me until something happened to them. During the Rites of Passage, there were many other types of monsters besides the Deadmen. No matter what happened, I decided to find where they went and looked for traces of the party.

Just a clue, trying to find a footprint wasn't that difficult. As I patiently followed the stone wall, I found sunken footprints left behind by sports shoes. It looked like they had jumped the wall here.

As I kept walking in the direction where the soil was swept away, I found a clue that the party had gathered here as I had expected.

After I confirmed that there was nothing around, it seemed that they were waiting for me here. After I confirmed the truth, the tinge of betrayal, that had stealthily took a corner of my heart, disappeared like melting snow.

I crouched down in the area where the party was, I slowly searched around and found one footprint after the other. If I had skills of a Ranger or a Trapper, they could have deduced how and why the situation occurred, as well as when, where and how many people were involved. Of course, that level of deduction was impossible for me. All I was able to do at the moment, was use my sharp eyesight with my Abilities.

Augmented by my perception, I compared the footprints one by one. I committed the prints created by the sports shoe into memory and began to look for other footprints. It seemed like the party had performed a shuffle dance since the footprints were all over the place. This made it difficult to distinguish one from the other and felt like it would take some time. Suddenly, an uneasy thought passed through my mind, but I told myself that it was way too early to come to a conclusion, and continued my search.

After I spent enough time to drink a cup of tea, I finished my analysis. I stretched my legs and stood up. Excluding the footprints of the party, I found no other strange footprints. If I was nit-picking, I did find one deep imprint. However, due to another sneaker's print on top of it, it was difficult to judge if it was from the party or not.

It certainly wasn't Deadman's, as there was no trail of dragging on the soil. The fact that it might have been a boss monster came

to my mind, but I immediately shook the thought out of my head. It had only been half a day since we started, and there were specific conditions for boss monsters to appear.

I put the thought of the boss monster to the corner on my head. A revelation never came. There was only one solution left. Even though I knew that it wouldn't work, I started to awaken my magic circuits.

In a single moment, I pulled out an explosive amount of magic power and activated the Third Eye. What I was about to do was different than just simply checking the other party's user information.

I could never have imagined that this kind of situation would arise, where I had to activate my magic. It was a race against time and I couldn't think of any other solution. They could all be killed while I wasted time uselessly, trying to conserve magic power.

Currently, I was going to use my Third Eye to not examine the present, but the 'past.' This was an exceptionally Unique Ability, through which I could even observe a higher dimension if specific conditions were met. That was why looking at the present, past and the future was possible with this Ability.

Just when I was about to start worrying, a scene seemingly penetrated my sight and I naturally focused on it.

PAK!

“Urgg....”

It was only for single a second, but the image flashed on my retina, which twisted up, and then a huge trauma hit my eye. The heated pupils felt like they were being burnt on a blazing fire. As I rubbed both of my eyes reflexively, I let out a bitter laughter.

Just one second. For one second I saw an image from the past, but The Third Eye got cancelled automatically. After a little, the pain in the eyes subsided, and I mumbled with a lethargic voice.

“Ha.... Haa. 96 magic points and yet my limit is only one second.... This is driving me nuts.”

Maybe, just maybe... but in the end, my Magic Attribute couldn't handle the Unique Ability Overdrive. This had just reaffirmed how high rank the Third Eye was, and I was filled with regret.

Looking at the past was equivalent to seeing into the future. It was different than simply predicting the future, it was an issue of different dimensions. I thought it might be a possible, as The Third Eye was S rank magic, but due to forced manifestation, the rank was reduced by two. Although a rank was recovered through Hwajung, It was only possible for the current me to review the present phenomena. Handling the past and the future was quite premature.

The pain was slowly subsiding, but right now, my vision was blurry. I think it was an aftereffect of the rebound from getting the magic cancelled. Fortunately, as time passed, my sight began to

sharpen. The loss of sight seemed to be only temporarily.

I had unintentionally used a dangerous method, but fortunately, there was one thing I managed to fish out.

It was only for a one second, but I had seen the 'past.' I sighed loudly, as I remembered the scene that ignited my retinas. I did my best to separate the gems from ordinary stones and had barely managed to get them out of the forest. However, it seemed that more troublesome things awaited me.

I could understand if I was lacking the power, but the reality, of having the power and still having to be careful about its use, made me depressed. If nothing else, I could make a ruckus in the Rite of Passage, but that was the very last resort.

It was like climbing mountains after mountains.

## Chapter 20 - Momentary Separation (2)

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Thanks! My throat was parched and you bought me a beer, thanks a lot. Your name is.... what? Kim Su-Hyun? From that small town of Myul? Of course I heard about it! That incident of the Wailing Cave is rather famous.... he he. Wow, meeting a celebrity and even being treated to beer, how could I ever repay you? Oh Right. How about I tell you a story. Would you like to listen to it?

What? You don't want to? Wait, just give me a moment and listen to my story. You will definitely be interested. It's about that widely spread rumor that the fierce Soul Commander heard about during the Rite of Passage. Yeah, that Soul Commander. Everyone in Hall Plain had to go through the Rite of Passage. Sit down. The place Angel's pulled a lot of crap at, that Rite of Passage.

There is so many back stories about that place. Think about it. Everyone is so busy just trying to survive, who would even want to piss around a monster infested area for seven days? There was this one crazy son of a bitch, though. He traveled through the entire area for seven days like it was his playground. The possibility of coming face to face with a Boss Monster just is much higher. Hm? What am I talking about? I have never met you before? I thought that you were a fairly sincere guy. What I meant is.... but before that, could you get me another beer please? Heehee... Thank you!

Try to remember. Do you recall those yellow and blue roofs? Yes. Yellow is the Rest Room, and Blue is the Safe Point. The first thing you see when you enter is that warning sign, right? You can't stay in the Rest Room for more than a day, or two days in Safe Point. Otherwise, the chances of a Boss Monster emerging is 100%. Ah...

That thing still makes me shudder. It looked like an Alien, and munched on humans like it was a tasty morsel...

Yup, we have met me before, but whatever. I ran like crazy. The funny thing is, taking the different Starting, Rest, and Safe Points into consideration, there is one other Point. You hearing this for the first time? Well, that's obvious. Where is it, you ask?

On the outskirts of the map, if you come out from the direction where the forest intersects, a big road comes up. I still remember it. That bumpy road. You can't go down that road, though. All kinds of monsters just gathered down there in droves. Although, if you follow the road, a city will appear. Still, who would ever bother to go there? I didn't even want to go into the forest in the first place. Even if you head for the city, the number of people who manage to reach there alive is few. We call that city a Trap Point. It's literally a Trap Point.

The Trap Point is a modern city with abundant amounts of food. It's a place that reminds you of the sweetness of Earth. It makes you want to never leave, since it takes advantage of human mentality.

A warning sign? Yeah, there is one, but it's different to the other signs. Just a simple scribble that you would think nothing of it. Anyway, that city tests you mentally and cleverly twists your mind. It makes you never want to leave. There are many Players that just become complacent once they step inside. The Players just live in comfort, thinking that they can stay there safely for seven days. Once they become complacent, it's game over.

On the third day in the city.... Do you know what happens? Huhu. Hm? How do I know this? Hahaha.... Well, I'm just going to drink more.

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As the evening came, I could see the day slowly turning darker. It was still a bit early to say it was evening. I saw dark clouds, and was worried it might rain as well.

As I was walking on the bumpy road, I felt impatient and anxious, waiting for a village to appear. I decided to slightly increase my walking speed. I increased my speed by sending magic to my legs. Now walking faster, I thought about the image I saw through The Third Eye.

The short, one second scene allowed me to guess what had happened to the party. The scene I saw was like this: An-Hyun had thrown away his shield and was running with An-Sol on his back. I didn't know why, but he had a look of urgent desperation on his face.

Lee Yu-Jung had a very dark look on her face. Whether it was due to worry or anger, she was following behind An-Hyun with a complicated expression. Only Kim Han-Byeol seemed calm as she followed last, holding the sword and shield An-Hyun had thrown away.

They had some injuries, but I didn't know if they were from an ambush or maybe something else entirely. It looked like something

had certainly happened to An-Sol. For now, I followed the path An-Hyun and the party had taken. As I kept following the man made path, I was sure that the village would come up soon. I felt confident that I would be able to reunite with the party there.

Just what had they been ambushed by? Just what had happened, for them to look so desperate? Concern didn't want to leave my mind, but no matter how much I thought about it, no answers reached me. I decided to just listen to their story later and continued running.

In the middle of my run, I felt a cold droplet on my cheek. I stopped just for a moment and looked at the sky, that was starting to fill with raindrops.

Plop. Plop. Plop. Plop.

As I was looking at the intermittent raindrops, I reflexively wiped my cheek. I hoped I would reach the city before the rain got any heavier. As if my prayer had been answered, I saw a cluster of buildings with my eyes far off in the distance.

I was certain that the party had entered the village. However, whether due to monsters in some parts of the village I wasn't sure if they had entered safely. If I knew this before, I should have come here straight away instead of wasting time.

Meanwhile, the number of the falling raindrops slowly increased. I wanted to avoid walking on the rain soaked earth, turned into sludgy mud. As I slowed down and trudged towards village, I

spread out my magic detection. I immediately stopped, when I felt something off with the village.

“Wha, what is it?”

I stuttered out unknowingly. I composed myself and increased the precision of my detection magic, but the result was still the same. Surprised I immediately used my magic and arrived at the village in an instant. I gasped when I saw the modern buildings at the entrance.

‘A building from Earth can be found in the Rite of Passage? And not just one, but a town of them?’

This village, no this city, it was difficult to call it a village. As I thought, the party had entered this city. I felt four presences, so it seemed everyone had safely arrived. However, that wasn’t what I was worried about. First, I had no idea what kind of monsters lied waiting inside. Second, what I seeing was a modern city.

The buildings in Hall Plain didn’t reflect modern design, but were built like something out of the Middle Ages. My first life I had spent in Hall Plain, was a chore of getting used to such aspects. Yet now the buildings of Earth were right in front of me.

Because of this unexpected situation complex thoughts whirled around in my mind, but I managed to calm myself and observed the city. When people entered Hall Plain for the first time, they had a challenge of adjusting their lives.

Life in Hall Plain wasn't comfortable compared to Earth, where science had flourished. In the Rite of Passage, buildings were built in similar way as Hall Plain, so people would have an easier time adjusting. However, I hadn't ever heard of or even seen something like the scene in front of me.

Unless the Angel host had gone crazy, it was impossible for such buildings to be placed in the Rite of Passage. I rubbed my eyes, but the scene in front of me didn't change at all. The Angels must be plotting something with this. This made me recall a story I heard from a Swordsman.

‘The Trap Point is a modern city with abundant amounts of food. It's a place that reminds you of the sweetness of the Earth. It takes advantage of your human mentality, and makes you want to stay forever.’

When I recalled the information about the Trap Point, I began to understand what I was seeing. Before I explained about Trap Point, I first have to explain about Boss Monsters. To put it plainly, it was impossible to slay the Boss Monsters in Hall Plain. Numerous people had seen such creatures, and they all had reach the same conclusion. It's impossible to kill it. Always flee on sight.

There were some conditions for Boss Monsters to appear. You had to use the Rest Room for more than a day, or use the Safe Point for more than two days. This was no different than an Angel's warning you to keep moving, rather than being pulled into a sense of security by a safe area.

I felt my my body tighten. I was begining to understand the

emptiness and silence of the city. Nobody among the party in my first life, even with their high Attributes, had managed to see Hall Plain except for An-Sol. I linked my speculation to the city in front of me, and came to a conclusion. No matter how astounding their abilities were, they would have never been able to handle a Boss Monster.

After I let out a deep sigh, I entered the city. The nostalgia of seeing such building for the first time in ten years hit me, but I had to find my party first.

As I entered the city, the grey colored buildings greeted me. My heart was disturbed by how this dark city greeted me with its gloomy rays of light.

The feeling that only skillfully honed people could sense, the scent of death. I wondered how many people this city had killed.

## Chapter 21 - Momentary Separation (3)

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The sky visible through the window, was blanketed by dark storm clouds. A faint fog was lingering and rain continued to drizzle. By staring at the rain droplets tap against the window, Kim Han-Byul could feel herself calming down.

Still far from being cozy, but she was at ease. Maybe she was sentimental unlike the current situation; however, if she had to compare it with being chased in the woods by those strange things, it was without a doubt better.

‘Come to think of it i used to love rainy days when I was little....’

Kim Han-Byul use to love rainy days. Walking in the rain with an umbrella in her hand as she listened to music gave her joy, an escape from her boring everyday life. A sudden desire for coffee began to arise. She thought a delicious fragrant coffee would warm her up from the inside and let her forget all that surrounded her.

Kim Han-Byul looked out the window with a doleful face. Judging from the overcasting shadow it seemed as though it was night time. The eventful day had taken a toll not only on her body but her mind as well. She turned her head as she rubbed her tired eyes. A large room about 66m<sup>2</sup> with all the necessities she needed: food, water, a bed, a toilet and even a shower facility.

When she entered the city while madly escaping, she felt a sense of disharmony. The city was too silent as if it was deserted. She was almost convinced it was a ghost town. Amongst the city a medium sized building stood out. The only building with a black roof top had caught the eyes of the gang. Be it luck or fate, after the gang entered the building they found that the building full of essential equipment.

Kim Han-Byul’s body and mind desired sleep, however, she felt it was too subtle to sleep yet. An-Sol was still in a daze, An-Hyun was busy looking after her. As for Lee Yoo-jung.....

Kim Han-Byul managed to find Lee Yoo-Jung without much difficulty. She was holding on to the sword that Kim Han-Byul had placed delicately next to the entrance. Kim Han-Byul had a good idea why Lee Yoo-Jung showed such behaviour; she let out a gentle sigh before speaking.

“Yoo-Jung.”

“Yeah”

“Put the sword down”

“No”

Lee Yoo-Jung unlocked the entrance taking in words from one ear to the other. Startled by the large clank at the entrance, An-Hyun bursted the room door open; he then frowned at the sight of Lee Yoo-Jung wielding the sword.

“It’s futile, just put the sword down and wait patiently”

Hearing Kim Han-Byul’s words Lee Yoo-Jung glared at her with an enraged face.

“What makes you say that?”

“.....”

“I’m going to bring Kim Su-Hyun back here so you guys just wait here.”

‘Su-Hyun. Kim Su-Hyun.’

Kim Han-Byul gently whispered the name in her head. Her head was flooded with thought of him. From the moment they met Kim Han-Byul knew that Kim Su-Hyun was very similar to her. She could sense the difference in him ever since she saw him at the vacant lot. His face and voice were always collected and his calm eyes, maybe they were the reason why his decisions were so compelling. Kim Han-Byul paused and looked at Lee Yoo-Jung before continuing to speak.

“You aren’t the only one who is worried about Kim Su-Hyun. It’s

not like there is anything we can change when we go there. Waiting patiently is the best decision at the moment”

“He may still be waiting for us there. Again none of you need to come. I’ll go get him if none of you are willing.”

“Lee Yoo-Jung! Kim Han-Byul is right. For now just put the sword down”

An-Hyun’s strict voice turned Lee Yoo-Jung’s head to him. After briefly scanning An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byul she snickered and continued to talk in a cynical tone.

“Shame on you. Right now Kim Su-Hyun may be searching for us here and there. Am I wrong?”

Lee Yoo-Jung’s words contained many emotions. All members of the gang felt a pain in their heart. An-Hyun held his silence; however, Kim Han-Byul was different. She glimpsed at the still unconscious An-Sol before opening her mouth.

“There was no choice. Those things were rushing towards us we were in danger as well. If it wasn’t for her everyone here maybe as good as dead.”

“You think no-one realises that? That’s why we took refuge and brought An-Sol here. AND THAT’S IT?! We are safe so that’s it? Kim Su-Hyun will somehow find a way?”

Kim Han-Byul could feel distress at Lee Yoo-Jung’s rhetorical questions. From the start she didn’t like the way Lee Yoo-Jung would shout on the top of her lungs, or the way in which spoke rudely. Without consideration Kim Han-Byul sneered as if mocking Lee Yoo-Jung and replied cold heartedly.

“Then go. Go and look till your satisfied. Who cares if you die or not”

She immediately regretted her words, but it was too late. An-Hyun looked at Kim Han-Byul with a stunned face. The same for Lee Yoo-Jung, she let out a laugh of disbelief, “Hah”

“You.... are really, a serious bitch. Kim Su-Hyun sacrificed himself to save this kind of person? What a disappointment. I guess telling him to not go with a worried face moments ago was all an act.”

“I clearly said don’t go. But Kim Su-Hyun insisted on going. How is that my fault?”

“You.... Ha.... nevermind. Talking to trash like you is just a waste of time and effort. Just keep your mouth shut, you ruthless bitch.”

Expecting another tantrum Kim Han-Byul was surprised at how Lee Yoo-Jung coped. Additionally her pride was wounded at how Lee Yoo-Jung called her trash and talked to her in a condescending tone. She may not have realised it herself but Kim Han-Byul was breathing much more furiously than before. As she continued to talk there was a hint of agony in her voice.

“That’s a bit too much. Did I say anything untrue?”

“I don’t care. At the very least I don’t want to live my life charading around.”

“What did you say?”

“How dare you glare at me. What are you going to do? Do you want to yank each other’s hair out? Just stop it, If you don’t want a scar across that milky face of yours keep your cute mouth shut.”

“Everyone give it a rest!”

An-Hyun raised his voice after being unable to handle the increasing level of dispute. The intensity of his voice brought an end to the dispute. An-Hyun reached out to Lee Yoo-Jung who was still glaring at him and Kim Han-Byul with sunken eyes.

“Hand it over”

“...No...”

Looking at the sight of Lee Yoo-Jung tightly hugging the sword An-Hyun let out a sigh and spoke gently.

“I am gonna go search for Kim Su-Hyun. Now that I think about it what you say is true.”

“.....Really? Then let's go together”

An-Hyun's sudden change in attitude surprised Lee Yoo-Jung but nonetheless her face showed she was very welcoming of him. An-Hyun weakly shook his head and replied.

“No. It's more convenient for me to go alone. Those things from earlier might still be out there. You stay here with Kim Han-Byul and take care of An-Sol”

“With her? No. I cannot trust her anymore”

Kim Han-Byul could feel something getting pent-up inside here watching Lee Yoo-Jung continue to denounce her. She finally lost her temper. However, Kim Han-Byul is very level-headed. When she is enraged she does not shout like Lee Yoo-Jung does she instead speaks in a much more harsh and icy-cold fashion. She began to speak in the coldest voice that she had never shown.

“Don't go. If you do you'll get done in as well.”

“Aren't you going to keep your mouth shut?”

“No you keep your mouth shut.”

“What? What did you say? Say that again”

As Lee Yoo-Jung approached Kim Han-Byul with large bulging eyes like she was ready to fight, An-Hyun forcefully snatched the sword from her grasp. However, Kim Han-Byul continued to speak to release all the built up anger.

“Don't speak when you don't understand what's going on. What do you think would've happened to us if she wasn't there? Didn't you see that swords and fists didn't work on those things? It's obvious that you are walking to your death but why do you insist on going?”

“You fucking bitch....”

“Swearing cause you don’t know what to say? How are you going to bring Kim Su-Hyun back when you don’t even know where he is? Think if you have a brain in that head.”

“What a nice excuse. Showing your true colours now huh? Do you not realise we are here right now because of Kim Su-Hyun? You backstabbing hypocrite. Now I get it. Your even worse than that bastard!”

By being compared with Trouble-Maker, no being described even worse than him Kim Han-Byul frowned her face for the first time. her voice shook with rage.

“You can’t bring back the dead! What’s so bad about wanting to survive?!”

That became the catalyst for Lee Yoo-Jung; she pushed An-Hyun aside and rushed to Kim Han-Byul. Kim Han-Byul also raised her hand grinding her teeth ready to slap her.

[Sound of door opening]

“What’s all this ruckus?”

The door to the unlocked entrance opened and a young man entered. Collected face and voice and calm eyes. Finally a crossbow on his left shoulder. Everyone in the room froze after seeing him. The conflict in the room had vanished.

“I’m glad everyone is safe”

He smiled gently and put the crossbow down then lifted his hand to greet everyone

It was Kim Su-Hyun.

## Chapter 22 - Trap City

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It is a shame we won't be able to see the completion of this 1000-chapters-novel together. At least we've revived the translation of the novel. Enjoy the rest of the story!

After a brief reunion, everyone including myself gathered at the living room. An-Sol was absent but hearing the faint sound of her breathing it seemed as though she was still unconscious.

In the living room there was an atmosphere of unsettlement. Much like the silence before a storm. It seemed as though my entrance was untimely.

It may not be an emotional reunion I didn't expect it to turn into this sort of situation. Judging from An-Hyun's awkward face and Lee Yoo-Jung and Kim Han-Byul both steaming at each other, there was probably a dispute. I heard Kim Han-Byul's outburst before entering but I'll leave it for now.

After the long awkward silence. It was An-Hyun who broke the silence.

“Kim Su-Hyun. I don't know what to say. Thanks for letting us get out of the woods. And we are deeply sorry for leaving ahead without waiting for you. I know it's just an excuse and doesn't justify our actions but I still wanted to apologise nonetheless.”

Seeing An-Hyun with his head down while speaking made my heart grin. He is usually dignified but knows when to show

weakness. He has a tendency to be neutral or moderate but he is not as much of a big jerk as I thought. I shook my head to An-Hyun's formal apology and spoke softly.

“At first I was flustered because I couldn't see you.”

“I am sorry, there's nothing we can say”

“No need to be sorry I mean you guys must've had your reasons. But I can't find your sister where is she?”

“Um.. well to tell you the truth...”

“Hold it An-Hyun, I'll take over from here. That's ok right Kim Su-Hyun?”

Lee Yoo-Jung quickly blocked An-Hyun from opening his mouth. The way she suddenly started talking in a casual tone to me was a reflection of how social she was. I would've preferred to hear it from Kim Han-Byul who is usually collected. But it seemed as though she was in a bad mood so I quietly nodded my head.

“So after you dragged those things into the woods...”

After getting a sign of approval from An-Hyun, Lee Yoo-Jung quickly glared at Kim Han-Byul before continuing the explanation. Her explanation was lacking but it was that much more simple. Since I had a gist of the situation I didn't require much further explanation. But...

“A ghost-like thing came out of nowhere?”

“Yeah but now that I think about it I think it would be inaccurate to label those things as ghosts. They didn’t seem to be completely transparent? We could somewhat make out that they had wings. The way they moved was also easy to see. But when Hyun tried to cut them with swords they didn’t fall”

This is quite important as I faced An-Hyun to hear about it in detail. His eyes were closed, trying to remember the fight. He slightly tilted his head before speaking.

“It’s like Lee Yoo-Jung said. I swung with all my might but it felt like i was swinging my sword in the air”

Swinging in the air. You can only vaguely make out their shape and it’s not completely invisible. They have wings. After combining these 3 characteristics something came to my mind.

Wraiths. An almost invisible humans with wings, these hints immediately let me know the monsters were wraiths. You cannot damage wraiths with physical attacks. They pass through the human body and deal mental pain. But hearing that An-Hyun was able to withhold over ten of these attacks I guess his rite to passage controlled the damage he had taken.

A question popped up in my head after hearing this. As of now the gang doesn’t have a clear method to defeat wraiths. Then how did they avoid them? I decided to bring up An-sol while

mentioning this.

“So is that why your sister is injured?”

An-Hyun shook his head to the question. The story that followed left me in disbelief. The wraiths focused An-Hyun after seeing that he was resistant to their attacks. Of course he was in pain and eventually he dropped both his sword and shield. In that moment of despair the one who saved him was An-Sol.

I asked him to explain more clearly but even An-Hyun couldn't exactly describe the event. The same goes for Lee Yoo-Jung and Kim Han-Byul. Just that An-Sol began to scream as her body glowed in white, when the light disappeared all the monsters had disappeared. An-Sol apparently lost consciousness right after and had not woken up since.

I nodded my head after hearing the whole story. An-Hyung broke the silence with a concerned look on his face.

“Kim Su-Hyun Sol will be alright won't she? She will wake up right?”

“How is her condition?”

“She's breathing steadily. Her pulse is normal. But from time to time she starts frowning in her sleep as if she is in pain. She lets out moans occasionally as well”

Magic Power Overdrive. An-Sol has already awoken her magic power? It was unbelievable but I managed to take it in. When I first started, I had a lot of difficulty due to my low magic power. It took me a long time to pull the sword in Hall Plain after my Rite of Passage.

But An-Sol started with a Magic power level of 75 so she may be different. You cannot research the realm of the subconscious so there is bound to be things that are a mystery to me. One thing I am certain of however, is that having a magic power level of 75 with such a fragile body would put a lot of stress on her. If she doesn't overdo it there is a good chance that I can help her.

“Well I will have to look into it, but she should be fine. Don't worry too much”

“The....then if you don't mind can you ...”

Looking at An-Hyun who desperately started talking I could understand how he felt and just as I was getting ready to lift myself a soft hand wrapped around my wrist. Looking at the soft sensation on my left wrist I could see Lee Yoo-Jung pouting.

“Hey An-Hyun. How can you say that to Kim Su-Hyun after he just came back. Aren't you hungry?”

“Um well I'm not starving to death it's ok. Let's take care of An-Sol first....”

“We already looked after her in turns. As long as you’re not a doctor it’s not like you can make an immediate difference. We told you our story so please tell us yours. I’ll quickly whip us up some grub so tell us while we eat. Please?”

She seemed very out of character; unlike her usual self; she was very assertive but it didn’t feel too bad. As if he was convinced An-Hyun smiled and nodded his head in agreement.

“Here have some water that was left over from earlier.”

“Oh thanks”

I extended my hand to the bottle that Kim Han-Byul grabbed out of her shirt. At that moment Lee Yoo-Jung snatched the bottle and gave it back to Kim Han-Byul. As I was dazed from what had just happened, Kim Han-Byul raised her voice in reaction.

“What are you doing?”

“Why are you giving him something you’ve been drinking. I’m going to give Kim Su-Hyun a brand new bottle. You finish your bottle on your own”

“Um... what are you guys....”

Lee Yoo-Jung stood up and went into the kitchen before I could finish my sentence.

Soon I could hear sounds from the kitchen. When I looked back at the other two; An-Hyun smiled awkwardly while Kim Han-Byul started coldly at the floor. It was somewhat unexpected but I cleared my throat and changed the subject.

“Has everyone else eaten?”

“...Yeah. We ate before you came we were all famished.... haha”

“No it’s ok. It would be foolish to wait for me when you don’t know when I would be back”

An-Hyun scratched his head with a face to show he was sorry. A new bottle was placed in front of me. Lee Yoo-Jung placed a plate down gently she had already finished making the food, I began to wonder if this was the same Lee Yoo-Jung that I knew. On the plate there were crackers with tuna topping from a can. I could tell she made an effort to make them presentable. Lee Yoo-Jung kindly opened my bottle for me and made an effort to speak in a very cheerful voice.

“Tadaa~! Special crackers made by yours truly! ”

“Oh wow these look really good let me have a bite”

Lee Yoo-Jung quickly stopped the hand of An-Hyun who extended his hand to the crackers. An-Hyun caressed the hand that Lee Yoo-Jung hit with a face of discontent but submitted to Lee

Yoo-Jung's sharp glare, and muttered under his breath.

“Come on that's being way too cheap”

“I made it for Kim Su-Hyun why are you the one trying to eat it when he hasn't even touched it? Where are your manners”

“Tsk”

“Kim Su-Hyun try it. I assure you it tastes great”

“Hm? Ye ok Thanks time to dig in”

I laughed at the sight of the still muttering An-Hyun and Lee Yoo-Jung who turned her head to him. The taste of cheap tuna and crackers spread in my mouth. Hardly a delicacy but it was edible. Of course it was no time to be a picky eater and it was quite delicious

Luckily the mood in the room was much more brighter than before. When I reached out for another cracker I felt pressured by all the eyes focused on me. I quickly tried to bring up a topic. Of course I couldn't say that I clobbered all 20 of those Deadmen so I tried to make a simple excuse. After telling Lee Yoo-Jung that the meal was delicious I began my tale of how I lead the Deadmen into the woods.

“So you were nearly bitten back there?”

“I tried as much as possible to move in an S shape between the trees. I didn’t expect one of them to show up right next to it. An inch further and my left hand would’ve been bitten. I still get shivers down my spine thinking about it.”

“Wow then we really would’ve never been able to see you again.”

“Lol Kim Su-Hyun, Lee Yoo-Jung was so worried about you that she threw a tantrum before you were here saying that we need to go save you that you might still be waiting there.”

“Don’t over exaggerate I’m going to kill you, I wasn’t that desperate.”

“See you just admitted that you were worried kk”

“Why you!”

As the two argued while giggling, I felt relieved. As I was about to let a sigh of relief out, Kim Han-Byul’s stiff face caught my eye. As she stared at us coldly, much different from before I could feel a small pain in my heart.

I tried to assume it was nothing but what Kim Han-Byul screamed before I came in seemed like something that shouldn’t be overlooked. I decided to have a word with An-Hyun as soon as the situation allowed me to.

## Chapter 23 - Trap City (2/4)

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After the discussion ended, An-Hyun led me to An-Sol to check on her status. Gazing at the sleeping figure lying on the bed, I felt like an intruder. Laying my hand on her forehead, her state was expected, An-Sol's magic was depleted. She would be back to normal before long, but I decided to help her out.

"I think it there should at least be one person looking over An-Sol till morning.

"I will do that."

An-Hyun obviously volunteered for the role and I nodded in agreement. Looking outside the window, darkness had descended completely. An-Hyun's eyes were already red from fatigue. He must be spent both emotionally and physically. He was hanging in there, but any more would be thrown over the edge and would become troublesome tomorrow.

"You look tired. Just go and sleep for a bit. I will look after her."

"Hyung. Aren't you tired?"

"Later. Let the ladies have a deep rest today, the two of us can set up a rotation for An-Sol. I will wake you up after you slept enough, we can change shift then."

"Ah. Rotation. We can do that. Then Hyung, I leave my sister in

your care.”

I nodded silently. An-Hyun staggered out of the room and closed the door on his way out. There were still things that I wanted to ask him but seeing how fatigued An-Hyun was, I thought it better to ask him the next time we were free. My mind was a mess thinking about Trap Point and with the party's current attitude, I needed some time to sort it out. But before that, I needed to do what I came here for.

Checking that the door was closed properly, I calmly activated my magic. Like a ripple on a still water, a faint red light swirled from my right hand. Slowly laying my hand on the middle of her chest, I began to transfer magic inside her. Seeing as I was healing her already, I decided to throw her a freebie.

If magic flowed in a counter direction, or when the magic circuit following the vascular system got twisted, it was usually most troublesome to fix. However, settling a simple Overdrive and straightening out some tangled circuits were an easy thing to do. An-Sol's body twitched as my pure fire attribute magic flowed into her.

Magical attribute changed depending on the person's alignment. The magic I could feel from An-Sol was vivid like a clear white light. At the first touch of my overwhelming magic, Sol's magic acted skittishly and was uncomfortable with it. To avoid a backlash I made my magic as soft as possible and gently embraced her magic. It's fine, It's fine, It's here to help you. Isn't it friendly? Just stay calm. With a constant soothing feel, my magic kept on caring for Sol's magic. As if Sol's magic realised the assistance, it

rushed towards to where my magic was.

To prevent her from reacting badly I nursed her magic as delicately as possible. Feeling her magic wiggling back and fro as if it wanted to be petted, I thought that was quite cute. Inspecting once more, I calmed the traumatised parts and relaxed the tangled places. By the time the process was about to reach its end, her pale face recovered some of her healthy red glow and she looked comfortable. Perhaps she is having a sweet dream?

Only one issue was left. After my final inspection and as I was trying to withdraw my magic, An-Sol's magic seems to have attached to mine. When I tried to take my hand off her, her internal magic pulled onto me, tell me not to go and pet her more. I barely shook it off and panted from the exertion.

Treating her took about an hour. A usually quick process took longer than expected, as I performed a thorough inspection and took to revitalising as well. Nothing came to my sense outside the room. It seems like everyone was in deep sleep. Giving both my arms a stretch I slumped to the floor, nothing needed my attention right now so it would be good to close my eyes for a bit.

\*\*\*\*\*

How long has it been? Hearing someone entering the room, I opened my eyes. The room was pitch-black. Turning my head I caught sight of a dark outline peeking from the door. Seeing Lee Yu-Jung had a bob cut and Kim Han-Byeol's hair was shoulder length. The outline had neither of such hair style, so it must be An-Hyun.

“You must be tired today. Go back to sleep.”

I greeted him with a calm voice but he didn't reply for a while. I could see him staring blankly at me. About a minute later An-Hyun slowly moved his lips.

“No, it's fine. I was so worried I couldn't sleep. Hyung. How is Sol?”

“She seems a lot better. I think by tomorrow she will wake up. So don't worry so much.”

“Really? That's a relief. Then Hyung, .....

An-Hyun was fidgeting. I waited calmly, presenting him with the opportunity to speak. I didn't know why but it felt like this was the correct move.

“Hyung. There is something I want to speak to you about. But this isn't the place for it.”

“Sure. Should we go to the rooftop?”

“Yes.”

An-Hyun didn't look like he slept much. Probably worried about An-Sol and everything else that had happened. From the

seriousness in his voice, I got up immediately.

Lee Yu-Jung was sleeping in the lounge, hugging the blanket tightly to her. Kim Han-Byeol wasn't here, it seems she was sleeping in a different room. I unlocked the door softly, trying not to wake her, and walked to the rooftop with An-Hyun.

My head felt clearer after breathing in the cold night air on the rooftop. We were silent as we stared at the pitch-black city in front of us. An-Hyun spoke first.

“Hyung. This city is too quiet.”

“It is, it's suspiciously quiet. We can't let our guard down.”

I could see a forlorn An-Hyun making a self-depreciating smile. From his expression, I could guess the topic he wanted to breach. I waited as this was something he had let out first.

“Hyung, I think you are amazing.”

“Nah. I'm as human as you, that's neither here nor there..”

“No, not that. What I wanted to say wasn't about that.”

An-Hyun shook his head three times in rebuttal. Dissent was evident on his face, with a glimpse of powerlessness underneath. It's not like I couldn't understand his feelings but his intention was

still vague that I decided to quietly wait for him continue.

“When Hyung left today I thought about a lot of things. When Hyung was still around I felt we got along well. Even without Hyung, I thought if the five of us worked together we could escape.”

“I thought so too.”

“Yes, but that didn’t happen. Hyung entrusted me to look after the others. But I couldn’t lead them very well. I collapsed after meeting those strange beasts and Sol was hurt because of it. And I am sure you felt the tension between Yu-Jung and Han-Byeol. Those two fought, to go save Hyung, or to stay put.”

An-Hyung spoke at length looking wretched. But he didn’t stop.

“And the thing I hated the most... was that I couldn’t do anything back then. I couldn’t even stop those two from fighting. The best I could force out was that, I will go. I couldn’t do anything and all I could do was volunteer. I felt so frustrated.”

“.....”

“If Hyung wasn’t here I would still be thinking in the same vein. What to do tomorrow. Would I lead well? I just wanted to die rather than struggle with this burden.”

“An-Hyun.”

I tried to stop the outpour of emotion from An-Hyun but he quickly shook his head no. He still had more to get off his chest.

“But at that moment Hyung appeared. Like a miracle. When I saw Hyung do you know what I felt? Thanks? No. Apologetic? No. I felt relief. If it was Hyung he could do it. With Hyung, we had something to believe in. It’s like magic, as soon as Hyung came back the tension subsided and Sol’s condition improved. Hyung is always calm and resolute. Like something unshakable? You feel different from us. I don’t know what it is but there is definitely something different.”

My stomach clenched as An-Hyun finished his monologue but I had managed to look unruffled. An-Hyun relaxed as he emptied all his worries, I replied with a quiet voice.

“Then can I say something as well. It won’t be as long.”

“It’s fine to be long. I will listen.”

Seeing him reply with a hollow voice, I smiled and placed my hand on top of his head. Shocked he looked up and faced me.

“Your doubts and burdens, it’s fine to feel like that. Rather, I think it’s fortunate you have these feelings.”

“Fortunate?”

“Look back, think what it was like in the forest. You didn’t try to be the centre of attention like that trouble maker, or try to suppress others. When you gave a simple opinion, Yu-Jung and Han-Byeol thought over it and commented about it. You and I thought over all the different opinions and chose the best methods.”

“.....”

“We all got your back. We all have a burden, but it doesn’t mean you need to carry all of them alone. Even if things go wrong, the blame lies with all of us, not you alone.”

“But...”

An-Hyun tried to respond but I raised my hand and stopped him. Catching my signal, An-Hyun closed his lips.

“You see me as someone amazing but I also think you are amazing. Getting your fear prone sister all the way here and stepping in when necessary. Just like how An-Sol depends on you, you also want to depend on. I, Yu-Jung and Han-Byeol also have something we depend on you for. With the five of us here, we can escape this place. Isn’t that what you first told me? But what you said after was quite contrary to the first message. Is it really wrong to depend on each other?”

I tried to keep it short but saying this and that made it quite long. However, I couldn’t stop and had to finish what I started.

“This burden, we will all carry it with you. So do what you can do, and that will be enough.”

“Do what I can do...”

“Yes. What you can do, so don’t worry about everything else. We will take care of the rest.”

I faced the night air as An-Hyun slowly digested my words. The cool night air today felt itchy. After An-Hyun spent enough time to drink a cup of tea, he lifted his face to look at the surrounding.

He had troubled eyes when he came up to the rooftop but now it was like the first time I had seen him, dark and rugged. He looked relieved as if a few of his burdens were lifted from him.

## Chapter 24 - Trap City (3/4)

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The dawn ushered in a bright new day. Having conversed with An-Hyun into the early mornings, we returned to the room and kept a nursing shift through the night. I told him to get some more sleep as An-Hyun was forcing himself to stay awake. He laid by the corner in the lounge for a brief rest but had fallen into deep sleep. With this, I closed my eyes and reflected for a bit.

Though there was nothing to be afraid of right now, being caught off guard was the enemy. Of course, this could just be paranoia, but I was just the kind of a person who took everything to the extreme. For the past 10 years, I never ate till full or slept deeply that now it had now become a habit. Thinking I should get a move on, I was about to rose myself. I could hear a person close to me and so slowly opened my eyes to a figure sitting silently next to me. That figure was no other than An-Sol.

“Ah!”

She was looking around restlessly, and when our eyes met, hers became as wide as a saucer. Really, I am not your enemy, there’s no need to be that surprised. So I greeted her, trying to sound as non-aggressive as possible,

“Morning. You okay?”

“Ah, good morning.”

I laughed with how disarrayed she was but still managed to utter

a good morning. Ah, what was wrong with me. Why is it that whenever I see her, my heart becomes weak? Something about her just made me want to protect her. Seeing me slowly raising myself up, she budged hesitantly and spoke in a soft voice.

“O, Oppa.”

“Hmm.”

“I am sorry....”

“Hmm?”

What is this kid saying all of the sudden? Yesterday, today, it feels like the only thing I been hearing apologies. I gave her a puzzled look which caused her to look down.

“I... what happened... because of me.... It must been difficult...”

Her speech was so muddled that anyone who heard her without knowing the context would misunderstand. Seeing her stuttering like this, I began to worry about this her future. Will she be able to cope with the divergent people within Hall Plain? Will she really become the Brilliance Priest? The symbol of all the female Players and equivalent to the Shadow Queen and the Princess of Execution? Such an unlikely tale. With a look of detachment, I answered her.

“There is no need to apologise. Rather, I heard you did

exceptionally well saving everyone.”

“Ah, not really! I don’t remember what happened!”

If I show what I was really thinking inside, she would wilt again, so looking friendly as I can I nodded. Colour returned to her face when she heard my compliment, she smiled a little as she waved her hand furiously. She was really the type to wear her heart on her sleeve. How did she grow up to be so pure and natural?

Suddenly I heard someone call me from behind.

“Su-Hyun Orabeoni. If you are up, please have some breakfast.”

“?”

“Huh? Orabeoni? Why are you looking at this maiden with such puzzled eyes?”

“?”

“Why are you looking... Damn, yeah I get it, I will speak normally. An-Hyun told me you were watching over Sol. As thanks, I made breakfast. Everyone else ate already so don’t worry about the others.”

“Yeah. That’s the Lee Yu-Jung I know. Thanks.”

Nodding and opening my hand to accept, she placed the plate in front of me with a red face. The menu was the same as yesterday, crackers with tuna on top. I want to tease her, saying that this might be the only thing she knows how to make, but looking at her cool eyes I felt that discretion was the better part of valour.

“.....”

“.....”

I bit into one of the crackers. Lee Yu-Jung and An-Sol just sat there silently, watching me eat. I put down the cracker I was nibbling on, with unease evident on my face. Lee Yu-Jung blinked expectedly for me to eat more, while An-Sol still sat innocently mumbling about. Everyone seems crazy today.

“Am I some kind of monkey in the zoo? Stop staring.”

“No, no. It’s just the way you eat is fascinating.”

“The way I eat?”

Was it fascinating? Hmmm. Was my eating habit that strange? It was the same as usual... Thinking nothing of it, a thought suddenly struck me.

An-Hyun chews lightly and swallows everything, but Oppa is completely different. You sneak your food in bit by bit, chewing slowly and swallow a small amount. You don’t even eat a lot, so

why do you eat like that?”

I couldn't answer immediately. Lee Yu-Jung's eyes were unexpectedly sharp. To tell the truth, there was a time I was low on supplies while being chased by Fairies in the Fairy Forest. I kept cutting my food smaller and smaller, eating just enough for me to last the day. This had become a habit. In a caravan, or an expedition, or even before a battle, I never ate till I sate my hunger as to maximise my senses. Satiety had the effect of dulling the senses.

I could never tell them exactly what happened, so I decided to change the subject.

“It's just a bad habit. When I can, I eat a lot, but in a situation like this, I usually eat in small portions. Rather, I can't see the other two, where are they?”

“An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol? An-Hyun said he will keep watch outside and Kim Han-Byeol said she will be on the roof.”

Seeing Lee Yu-Jung easily answering my question, it seems she didn't suspect much. Inwardly, I gave a sigh of relief. But following the gaze on my back, I saw An-Sol looking at me with vivid eyes. When our eyes met, she laughed out awkwardly. Just what was going on today?

I felt An-Sol was like a child. When a child first meets a stranger, they instinctively become suspicious. They were afraid and nervous of the possibility of being harmed. Approaching a child

carelessly would result in tears.

However, becoming friends with a child was easy. At first, you had to set a distance and show that you mean no harm. When the child became curious and toddle toward you, that was the most suitable time to become a friend.

That was just a brief review on An-Sol... Biting on another cracker Lee Y-Jung made, I shifted track on my unsatisfying thought process and was plunged into another theory. Setting the 24:00 time as a counter, today was the second day since we entered the Trap Point. Meaning this place was safe till the clock struck midnight today. Although no one spoke, they all seems to be enjoying this place.

“I wish those two would come in early, there are things we need to discuss.”

“What? You mean what we are going to do from now on?”

“Something like that.”

“What’s it about Oppa. Tell me and Sol first.”

Lee Yu-Jung was crouching with her arms around her knees, looking at me with a puzzled expression. An-Sol looked anxious by my forthcoming proposal. I didn’t know what kind of resistance I would face, by I would tackle it head on. No matter how difficult it would be to convince them, they had to know the truth.

“We should probably leave this City today.”

Just as I expected, they froze on the spot when they heard my proposal.

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“I was out on a quick patrol. It’s just like you said Hyung, it's frighteningly quiet.”

Entering the main door, the first thing An-Hyun confirmed was that the City was suspiciously quiet. Hearing I had something to discuss, we all moved to the living room. Fresh air seems to have set settled Kim Han-Byeol, as she had recovered her usually aloof expression. After checking everyone was here, I spoke.

“Everyone I am sure the an Angel told you something about this Rite of Passage.”

“Maybe. I don’t really remember anything. I was busy fighting with those winged things that I didn’t hear anything.”

I had a bitter smile on my face as I saw Lee Yu-Jung shaking her head in doubt. Putting her aside, for now, I turned faced An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol. They thought for a while before they spoke in turns.

“I read the situation but there were too many things to remember.... Like how we have to find our own water and food, that death in this place was real so we should be careful, and to survive we must head to the warp gate at the centre... and there was something else.”

“We have to endure this place for seven days.”

Kim Han-Byeol finished off for An-Hyun. These were the exact words I was waiting for.

“Yes, exactly that. Survive for 7 days. Miss Kim Han-Byeol, do you perhaps remember any other clauses?

At my question, Kim Han-Byeol’s face scrunched up trying to remember

“I do. I remember the angel telling me to never stay in one place for too long. Either to keep moving for 7 days or go straight towards the centre.”

I nodded in agreement and was about to speak, but Lee Yu-Jung cut me off.

“But Oppa Isn’t it safe here? There is a house, food to eat and a place to sleep. Don’t you remember what happened yesterday? We faced nothing but hardship after coming out of that forest.”

“Yes but, Hyung. Do we really have to leave this place? We don’t

really have to believe everything the angel said to us.”

Lee Yu-Jung looked hopeful, being vouched by An-Hyun. They already disliked the idea of heading out once more. Turning a blind eye to their hopeful gazes I responded calming to their counterpoints.

“With everyone being so comfortable, I think you are all becoming slothful. Then let’s think in reverse.”

“Think in reverse?”

“Yes. An-Hyun had just come back from his patrol and knows that this city is too quiet. The forest was filled with tense moments, and even outside of it you were attacked. We might face the same thing again if we go out, but...”

"When we go out it would be the same. But....."

I paused temporarily for effect and continued.

“The angels want us to act in a certain way and this isn’t it. They also warned us to remember? Survive for 7 days or go towards the central warp gate, and never stay still. We need to grasp what the Angels really want from us. Putting two and two together about the Rite of Passage and our situation we are obviously going against their wishes. Don’t you find it strange right now? Compared to everything else outside this city, it’s too comfortable. There’s a lot of food and not even a hint of monsters as well. This

must be a trap. I think that the longer we stay here, the more likely that something might happen to us.

“... So Oppa, you want to leave this place because it feels bad.”

“I know it's difficult to accept this on a hunch I have. But this place is just filled with this uneasiness. I think we should rest as much as we can, grab some supplies and leave. Preferably today if we can.”

Though I was trying to persuade them, I didn't really have the confidence to convince them to my side. Trying to persuade someone in the face of danger or telling them to leave their safety was very differently. Moreover, I felt my persuasiveness was lacking in this situation. My argument wasn't completely devoid of logic, but a chunk of it relied too much on prediction and feelings. But there was nothing I could do about it. This was just the difference between those who experienced Hall Plain and those who didn't

For a moment no one spoke, they were all hesitant and it was clear to see they didn't want to leave. I could kill the boss monster with ease, but I wanted them to at least go through the course the Angel had prepared for them. The more comfortable they are now, the more they will suffer in Hall Plain. An-Hyun stared hard at me and then looking to everyone else.

“Everyone's opinion different... So let's decide by majority.”

“A Majority vote?”

“Yes. But I will put two conditions on this vote.”

“What conditions?”

I felt amused by this unexpected suggestion. A majority vote, something I haven't heard in a long time. Kim Han-Byeol responded positively, though still looked at him expectantly. An-Hyun nodded and replied.

“It's not much of a condition. First, everyone can choose either yes to leave, no or abstain. But they must state the reason for their choice. And second, whatever was decided must be followed without any complaint.”

Hearing An-Hyun's explanation, Lee Yu-Jung energetic spoke out, certain that the vote will go her way.

“Yes, Yes! No objection. A vote, yes a vote is great. Let's vote right now. Can I go first?”

“Yeah, it's best to get something like this out of the way. First, let me put down Hyung's vote as yes and we already heard his explanation.”

“I have no objection to that.”

“Then... Is there someone with a different opinion? If there isn't,

we will do continue like this.”

As Kim Han-Byeol, An-Sol and I agreed, An-Hyun also nodded in agreement. Looking expectantly at everyone, Lee Yu-Jung began to speak.

## Chapter 25 - Trap City (4/4)

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“I am absolutely against this. Look around you, between the forest and here, isn’t the answer is obvious? I don’t want to risk my life because of Oppa’s bad feelings. I don’t want to face the dangers outside this city like yesterday.”

I thought maybe she would go along with my plan but I was wrong. Lee Yu-Jung voted against leaving and I was sure that the opposing vote would start coming out one by one. My mouth was becoming dry, still, I decided to be patient and let the chips fall.

Next was Kim Han-Byeol. I was hoping she would vote for my side so I turn my attention to her. Looking at me intently, she spoke with her usual cool tone.

“I really do not want to leave. However, after seeing the results he produced, I don’t think it will be bad following his reasoning. Rather, his judgement hasn’t lead us astray. I don’t think there is enough precedent as evidence but he is skilled. I can’t pick whether to agree or disagree. Therefore I will abstain.”

Kim Han-Byeol abstained and took the easy way out. Lee Yu-Jung looked confident that we would remain in the City as her face was all smiles. With the outcome uncertain, I decided to prepare for the worst. If the Boss Monster showed up, it would be trivial to beat it up. The problem was doing it without getting caught.

There was just An-Hyun and An-Sol left to vote. An-Hyun comforted his sister, stroking her hair.

“Sol.”

“Hm?”

“What would you like to do?”

Hearing An-Hyun, An-Sol looked troubled. She folded her fingers in uncertainty, counting the votes. Catching my eyes, she flinched in surprise and her face became red in embarrassment. She quickly turned her head away but afterwards kept stealing glances at me. Maybe she was sick?

“Sol you definitely against it~? Right? It's safe and comfortable here. If we go outside the monsters roar~! And rush after us!”

I wonder when Lee Yu-Jung started to treat An-Sol like a child. Noticing that, An-Sol cheeks puffed up and her lips were puckered as she shook her head. Glancing at my way once more, she spoke in a soft voice.

“I... I want to support Su-Hyun Oppa.”

Oh.

“Then! Support! Huh? What? You agree with him?”

Lee Yu-Jung was nodding excitedly, then as An-Sol word

registered in her mind her expression changed and lunged at her looking like a wolf trying to eat her alive. An-Sol swiftly clung to her brother. An-Hyun, even Kim Han-Byeol looked at her in shock. An-Sol shrank back from all the looks she was receiving and just mumbled for a while before speaking again.

“Yes, I agree.”

“Why! Just why!”

“Hik!...”

Beating back the vicious Lee Yu-Jung, An-Hyun spoke softly to the frightened An-Sol.

“Sol, tell everyone why you voted yes.”

“Um.... Hu... Just because. I just feel like we should. Because...”

Hearing that it was based on her feeling, An-Hyun’s expression changed for an instant. It was a short moment but I definitely saw it. I wondered why this would make him react like that.

“Ya! How can you base it on a feeling...”

“Shut up!”

Lee Yu-Jung became quiet when An-Hyun raised his voice. An-Hyun looked extremely serious. Frowns marred his brows as he looked at An-Sol. Unable to withstand the serious look she was receiving, An-Sol just bowed her head and pointed her finger towards me.

“Before it felt vague... But today in my dream I saw Su-Hyun Oppa.”

“Everyone please stay quiet for a moment. Sol, finish your story.”

“We were all sleeping in this room when a giant monster appeared. It looked like an alien and came to this exact building... everyone was in danger. We couldn’t do anything and it looks like we would all die, no, I was sure I saw everyone die. But then my dream suddenly changed.”

“How did it change?”

“Like a spring being unwound, the dream reversed back to the beginning and Su-Hyun Oppa appeared. When the monster came this time, it was different. Su-Hyun Oppa told everyone that he would stop the monster so we should all escape. I was being carried by Oppa out of the city and I looked back because I was worried about Su-Hyun Oppa but then the dream ended.”

“Do you remember anything in your dream?”

“I think I heard something terrifying at the end? Maybe a shout?

I think I heard a sound but... I don't know."

We were silent as the grave as we focused on her story. Having come back to the past, for the first time I looked at her with in a new light. There were things that I didn't know but this was beyond me.

In terms of her Attributes, she had 75 Magic and another 100 on Luck. My Magic was at 96 points and it was nothing to scoff at. If I entered Hall Plain as I was, this amount of Magic point would allow me to be one of the best Mages. With my Third Eyes, I had barely managed to see 1 second of the past. But through her dreams she had seen both the past and the future.

There was a subtle difference between me and An-Sol. I could see exactly what had happened in the past and see it whenever I wanted to. An-Sol's dream lack the certainty and seems to activate randomly. This must be all thanks to her extremely high Luck point.

With this, it solved one mystery I wondered about. The reason why I couldn't find the party during my first time in Hall Plain. Somehow, they had all managed to gather together and had reached this City. They had exceeded their two safe days and been attacked by the Boss Monster. An-Sol must have been the only survivor left.

"Haa...."

An-Hyun gave a loud sigh. Having finished her story, An-Sol

seems unsure as she looked at everyone for their response. Tapping his fingers on the floor, An-Hyun was deep in thought. Looking perturbed he spoke to all of us.

“I also agree with Hyung’s opinion.”

“What, why? You also said you didn’t want to leave...! Are you taking your sister’s side now?”

Lee Yu-Jung couldn’t believe what was happening and immediately tackled the issue. An-Hyun replied apologetically.

“I am not taking sides. This might sound funny or not but...”

Dipping his face, indicating An-Sol who was still clinging onto him, he spoke.

“I was with Sol for 19 years. There were so many things that happened and every time her feelings were uncannily accurate.”

Of course, with 100 Luck point, she gained intuition and clairvoyance and it was also possible to predict the future. Though rank did support the skill to a point.

Lee Yu-Jung frowned and lamented.

“This feeling and intuitions. I had enough.”

“I am not lying. Whenever Sol was feeling uneasy, some bad always happened. The dream is a bit unusual but... Anyways, there are 3 yes votes, 1 against and 1 abstain. As we all agreed, we are going to follow the opinion with the most vote. Everyone get up, let's head out now.”

“We are going to leave right now?”

“With Sol dream, it's best that we leave as fast as possible. Everyone, pack only the essentials. Hyung, just in case can you go out on patrol?”

“Ok. Will do so. If everyone is done, shout.”

Seeing the change in An-Hyun from yesterday, I felt content. Equipping the crossbow on the left arm, I shook the dust off and left.

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There was a subtle difference about An-Hyun. He undertook to patrol the area this morning and was overall strangely proactive. The private exchange from yesterday was not enough to completely change his inner troubles. However, looking at his recent attitude, he seems to have taken my word to heart and was doing the best he could. Happily humming at his positive change, I began to look around.

Just as An-Hyun said, the best time to leave was now. Bumbling

about and procrastinating had to be absolutely avoided so that we could avoid travelling in the dark. Leaving in the morning and finding a safe spot by the afternoon would be a much better alternative. With the bustling and hustling about below, it seems like they were planning to bring as much as they could carry.

Breathing in the still chilly air, I felt refreshed. If this party was made of Park Don-Gul, Lee Bo-Rim and Lee Shin-Wu I am sure they would be throwing up a racket trying to stay. However, things had turned out for the better, with the party being composed of high-status Players. A moment of silence pleases for Park Don-Gul and his party.

We had survived the passed the forest, which was the most physically demanding area of the Rite of Passage and broke through the psychological barrier that was the Trap Point. If we remained vigilant against the randomly appearing Boss Monster and the other survivors, we would have a much easier time heading toward the central warp gate. Other monsters would definitely appear as well...

“Excuse me...”

When I was about to recollect all the monsters that could appear while we headed to centre, I heard someone calling for me. Turning around, I saw Kim Han-Byeol with a small bag on her back. It seems her preparations were over.

“Yes. Are you ready?”

“I finished my preparations but the others are still getting ready.”

“I see. Then I will keep watch for a bit longer.”

“... Could we talk for a minute?”

I was bewildered by her sudden request to chat. Nodding I gave a positive reply.

“Yes, anytime.”

Searching my face, she slowly approached me. I wondered what she wanted to speak to me about. Carefully judging my expression, she cautiously spoke.

“Did you perhaps... Did Yu-Jung Unni or An-Hyun Oppa tell you anything?”

“About the fight you and Yu-Jung had?”

“That... and anything else?”

I shook my head as I had not heard anything particular about Kim Han-Byeol.

“I see. Well...”

Her story wasn't anything special. All of it was just about her rejecting Lee Yu-Jung's proposal of going out. I felt a bit bitter when she said the remainder that survived should try and stay alive, but knowing that it wasn't her true intention I could let it pass easily. Rather than looking like a shallow-hearted bastard, I thought to let it go was better. No matter, this was such a common occurrence in Hall Plain there was nothing to get upset about.

“... I am sorry. I was just so angry back then. Looking it from your side, it must have been really unpleasant...”

It's the first hearing such dead response from her usual tranquil voice. It looks like she still wanted to maintain a relationship with Lee Yu-Jung but it was difficult for me to butt in. Smiling, I gave her a reassuring answer.

“No, don't worry about it. Rather, I think you did alright.”

“.....”

“Really. You gave a calm judgement to the situation at hand. If they went out then and there, Lee Yu-Jung and An-Hyun would have definitely been attacked. I don't think you need to apologise for this.”

“But...”

“I am worried about Yu-Jung as she is very hot tempered, it's

quite fortunate that you are here to calm her down. If the same situation arises next time, please stay your course. I think that will be much better.”

“... Thank you.”

We caught each other's gaze as we finished speaking. I could see that her smile had returned. She had smiled for a brief moment but at that moment, she was beautiful.

Unexpectedly... I was reminded of 'her' in Hall Plain.

# Chapter 26 - Meeting Some People I Know

## (1/3)

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Amongst the monsters appearing in the Rite of Passage, a monster called Mankey had a similar appearance to simians. Unlike Deadmen, these Mankeys were proper monsters. They were covered in soft furs so they had a non-existent defence, however, they were cunning and moved around in packs of 4 or 5. This monster was difficult for a beginner to handle.

“U-ki! U-ki-ki!”

And currently, we were fighting 5 Mankeys that were as big as us. They were bulky with extremely long tail, though powerful they weren't as nimble. They had a surprise jump attacks, but most of the damages could be mitigated by avoiding the monster's landing points.

“U-ki! U-ki-ki!”

“Be careful!”

An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol was engaged in a difficult battle with three of these Mankeys. Lee Yu-Jung and I were each taking care of one of these Mankeys, so we were at a numerical disadvantage. But it was only numerical.

It was then. In their back and forth struggle, I saw one of the Mankey An-Hyun was battle slip away and was readying for a

jump. Judging its readiness, it seems it was targeting me. Usually, preying on the precarious Lee Yu-Jung was the normal course of action, though it looks like these Mankeys didn't like to attack women.

These Mankeys had a strong desire to breed that they became crazy when they saw females, especially Fairies (I personally thought that they went out of their ways to catch Fairies.) They went stir crazy when they saw human females that these monsters planned to kill all the guys first and then capture the girls.

“Hyung! Yu-Jung! One of them disappeared!”

An-Hyun shouted in a loud voice. His situation was slightly alleviated as his frantic fight against 3 monsters was reduced by one. He was still a novice yet he took his eye away from this life and death battle.

Hearing An-Hyun's shout, Lee Yu-Jung took a more defensive posture. Handling one of these monsters was difficult, but hearing that she might have to engage two of them, her body instinctively cowered. Soon the crouched Mankey jumped high into the air with a shriek. This was the moment I was waiting for.

Ping!

Without delay, I pulled on the string. With a sharp sound resonating in the air, the bolt pierced the Mankey's head. There was the advantage of extra force while falling from the sky, however, the monster hadn't thought about the disadvantage of

being unable to move freely. Or maybe it thought it was impossible to be hit so easily. I was currently let the kid's practice right now if I became serious....

‘Ugh. There’s no point speaking my mind.’

“Oppa! On your side!”

I know, I know. While I was aiming for the monster in the air, another Mankey tried to blind side me. Without looking, I avoided the attack by a sheer millimetre and with the bolt in my right hand stab the other Mankey’s head. A clean counter. I could feel the bolt smoothly penetrate the flesh of the monster.

“KIIiiii....”

Kung!

With a mournful cry, the Mankey in front of me collapsed. At the same time, the corpse of the Mankey in the air landed. In 3 seconds I eliminated 2 of the monsters. I quickly recovered the bolts and observed the situation. Everyone was still fighting.

Like before An-Hyun was fighting with a sword and shield combo, while Kim Han-Byeol was wielding a slightly thin long sword though her attacks were rough. Lee Yu-Jung was dashing around with two sharply trimmed daggers.

An-Hyun was in front, engaging with his sword and shield and

when an opening appeared, Kim Han-Byeol pierced through. When they broke through, An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol attack simultaneously. While the tactic was rough on the edges, the results spoke for themselves. On the other hand, Lee Yu-Jung was struggling with reach and was having trouble attacking. She frequently managed to land a blow on the Mankey's arm, but more often than not she only slashed air as the Mankey retreated back.

It has been only 3, 4 days since they grabbed a weapon, expecting anymore was impossible. Rather, it proved that they were high stat Players as we made fast progress through the Rite of Passage. Exhaling lightly, I aimed my crossbow toward the Mankey Lee Yu-Jung was fighting. I wasn't going to finish it off, rather make an opening for her to take advantage of.

Ping!

“Kiiii!”

The bolt flew and pierced into the right chest of the Mankey. Unlike the Deadmen, the Mankey's could feel pain. It gave off a pained shriek and staggered back. Lee Yu-Jung's eyes lit up as she saw the bolt in the Mankey's chest and she took the opening. Leaning low, she pushed into attack range, show off her 50 agility points.

“Die! You fucking pervert monkeys!”

Spewing profanity, Lee Yu-Jung attacked like she met her lifelong enemy, her daggers crossed. At the same time hearing a

below from An-Hyun, it seems he was going for the final blow.

One, two, three, four, five seconds. After five seconds, the Mankey's the party was fighting all collapsed. The Mankey Lee Yu-Jung was fighting had a large X slash on its chest. The Mankey An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol was fighting was littered with cuts and wounds. The shallow wounds afflicted from the beginning of the battle had affected them to the point a single blow was enough to end it. Ah, this must be what it's like training people.

The three looked at the Mankey I killed, shook their heads and slumped to the ground. They breathed heavily while trying to relieve their tension. It was understandable seeing how their usual tempo of one enemy had increased to five.

"Ah... Shit. I am covered in Monkey blood. I feel like crap."

Shaking the blood out of her bob cut hair, Lee Yu-Jung spat on the ground. Lying on the ground plastered in blood, she looked strong and beautiful like the Goddess of War. An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol was no different. Their clothes were torn and dried blood spattered their whole body here and there. The only people who were better off was An-Sol and me.

Closing my eyes, I began to get lost in my thoughts.

It has been 3 days since we left the City. We had survived for four days and today was the fifth day. If we kept going at this pace, we might be able to reach the Warp Gate by the sixth, or by the latest seventh day.

During the five days together, our life was monotonous and also a spectacle. We walked, and fought, and rested, and walked, and fought. Repeat and rinse. The first monster we encountered after leaving the City was Mandragoras, in that battle we almost lost An-Sol. The monster appeared out of nowhere from the ground, with its mouth wide open. Everyone screamed in shock except for me.

An-Hyun ran in without a plan and was hurt from the thorns, thankful I was able to respond in time. Through that incident, Kim Han-Byeol and Lee Yu-Jung seems to have realised something as they grabbed the weapons available at the Safe Point and declared they would fight. An-Hyun expressed his displeasure at the girls fighting, but they were determined.

I didn't know if they felt troubled relying on me and An-Hyun to fight all the battles or if they genuinely wanted to help. But one thing I could see clearly in their eyes was a strong desire to survive. Seeing as both of them needed the practice, I readily nodded my head.

From then on, we left the Safe Point and passed by the forest and came upon a person. The exact place we found her was the stomping ground of these Mankeys. She was quite pretty but unfortunately, we were too late as she was already dead. Her body was almost stripped naked, with her clothes torn in pieces. Bruises could be seen all over her body. Steam could be seen rising from her pubic area, with white semen flowing out. It looks like she was raped by the Mankeys just short while ago before we arrived. Seeing blood trickling out from her mouth, she seems to have killed herself unable to endure what was happening.

Looking at the scene, Lee Yu-Jung became mad with anger desperately asking to destroy all the monkeys. By chance, we happened upon five Mankeys with their genitalia exposed and immediately fought them off. Mostly likely these Mankeys must have heard Lee Yu-Jung's rant and came at us. With the girl dead and having smelt fresh female prey, in their excited state they wouldn't have left us alone.

In conclusion, victory was ours. Thinking we should be more carefully from now on, I snapped out of my thoughts.

“Sol, can you give Unni a towel and a water star?”

“What did you say?”

Lee Yu-Jung immediately jumped onto Kim Han-Byeol's mistake.

“Ah, sorry. I was tired so it didn't come out right. Not a water star, a bottle of water.”

“Yes... Unni it must be difficult.”

“Bullshit. Look at Oppa, how can he kill those Monkeys so easily? Gimme the crossbow! I wanna use it!”

I chuckled awkwardly at Lee Yu-Jung's tantrum. If it's unfair, why don't you become stronger?

‘Me, I had no one to help me in the beginning. I crawled through with only my sword.’

Of course, I couldn’t actually say that, so I just chuckled awkwardly.

With their little experience in handling the weapon, they seem to have realised there was something different about how I fought. Kim Han-Byeol was sitting cautiously regulating her breathing, while An-Hyun was breathing heavily looking at me seriously.

“Hyung, were you part of the special forces? How can you fire the crossbow so well?”

“... You learn everything in the army these days.”

“Oppa, don’t joke. Shooting probably, but learning the crossbow?”

“You haven’t even gone to Seoul. Tell it to me after you go to the army. You think it’s a place where they teach you only how to shoot guns? Guns, swords, Taekwondo and all kind of martial arts including techniques with daggers, darts, bow and crossbow.”

An-Hyun, Lee Yu-Jung and An-Sol had a strange expression on their face after hearing my explanation. Seeing Kim Han-Byeol smile, it seems she was the only person to realise I was speaking nonsense. Though there was nothing to worry about. With the

team set in stone, this much was permissible.

“Ah... I don’t know. I want to rest right now, I don’t need this headache right now.”

“If you are going to rest, sit or stand up. What if you get attack right now?”

“Don’t know, don’t know, don’t know, don’t know. Sol. Can you get me a chocolate, please? I am hungry.”

“Sol, give me one as well.”

“Me too.”

“Yes~. I will bring it right now~.”

At Lee Yu-Jung, An-Hyun and Kim Han-Byeol’s request, An-Sol moved quickly to get it. At An-Hyun’s strong insistence, An-Sol was left out of the battle. Instead, she was our helper. She seems content as her she liked to help people and these small request didn’t bother her.

I slowly sat down as I observed An-Sol smiling brightly as she handed out a water bottle.

Human’s adaptation to their surrounding was astounding and with a deep desire to live, the synergy between this two aspect

created an amazing effect. I felt these words were true. Even if they were high stat Players, these girls were living ordinary lives just a few days ago and now were wielding weapons proficiently against monsters. I laughed as I remember the first time I defeated these monsters and shuddered at the thought of taking a life for the first time.

Though a slight cause for concern but after having fought through so many life and death battle with these monsters, they didn't feel any mercy for them. But if their opponent was a person? Will they be able to fight decisively without hesitating? If there was an opportunity, I wanted to the party have such an experience. Though I don't think we will have that chance.

“Hey, I think it's time to go. Let's keep a steady pace till we find a yellow roof. Hyung you alright?”

“Yeah.”

These Rest Rooms will become more difficult to find as we get closer to the Central Gate. There was no need to demoralise them, so I just replied simply. Lee Yu-Jung looked slightly at ease as she nodded. Dusting off her cloth as she was about to stand up, I followed suit. But I stopped what I was doing. Currently my magical detection was off for practice reason, however, I could hear several footsteps.

I turned my head toward the bushes where I heard a noise.

“Huh, who the hell are you.”

At that moment, we saw four people appearing from the thickets.

# Chapter 27 - Meeting Some People I Know

## (2/3)

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A total of four people appeared from the thickets, with a ratio of three guys and one girl. They all had dishevelled hair and their clothes were in poor shape like a vagabond. I didn't mean this as an insult as our own clothes were in a similar shape.

I quickly looked over the four of them. The one at the furthest left was a guy with short sports hairstyle and was holding a large bow in his right hand. He looked like a guy who knew how to handle a bow. His lips were pressed tightly and he looked at us with his hollow eyes. I felt he was a guy with a very reserved personality.

‘Huh...?’

I didn't know what it was but he seemed quite familiar. If it was a Player I knew, that meant the person was active in Hall Plain. He looked very common, but for now, I put this aside and went to the next person in a clockwise direction.

Next person was right at the front, his hair was so long that it reached his hips. His face was very slender and he had slim features, if you saw him from the back you would mistake him for a girl. But from his firm chin and sharp eyes, you could tell he was a guy.

In the centre was a girl that was protected by everyone, she looked refined. She looked trouble and was looking around. It

seems she was searching for something.

Finally, on the right end, there was a guy spinning his sword and flashing his teeth. His shifty actions really grated on my nerves. The silence was broken as the lead guy with an exhausted voice spoke about us.

“I think they are survivors just like us.”

“There is nothing to be amazed about, we met some survivors before.”

The person holding the bow replied stiffly. The guy playing around with the sword, tossing it and catching, laughed at us and acted boorishly.

“Tsk tsk... They look what, early twenty? Poor bastards... they are only children.”

Hearing that, An-Hyun immediately took a position with his shield and took a step forward. I quickly grabbed his shoulder and shook my head, telling him to wait it out. Fortunately, An-Hyun understood my intentions. He gritted his teeth and stepped back. Seeing this, that thuggish guy playing with his sword chuckled and his eyes became wild.

“Did you see that? That punk looking bastard. He became angry because of what I said. Ah man, I just can’t say anything can I? Scary.”

“You provoked him first. Step back and look after Jung-Min.”

“... Tsk.”

After being criticised by the bow-wielding guy, he pouted his lips and stayed quiet. However, my party was already cold and stiff by their response. The party was put off by their conversation, talking amongst themselves like we weren’t even there.

Slowly the tension was rising until the long hair man spoke up.

“Hello, nice to meet you. My name is Wu Jing-Min. As you must know by now, I am just another person that got brought into this miserable place.”

‘Wu Jung-Min. The Crimson Canine’s Clan Lord?’

I was startled, remembering who he was. That devilish existence with his trademarked dual wielding. Are you telling me that the person in front of me was that Wu Jung-Min...?

I immediately activated my Third Eye.

< Player Status >

1. Name : Wu Jung-Min(Year(s) o)
2. Sex : Male(26)
3. Height · Weight : 177.9cm · 65.7kg
4. Alignment : True · Chaos

[Strength 51] [Resistance 43] [Agility 59] [Vitality 48] [Magic Power 55] [Luck 36]

I thought that no one could surpass An-Hyun’s stat in the Rite of Passage, but Wu Jung-Min’s stats broke that idea into pieces. I was astonished as in front of my eyes was that Wu Jung-Min, the Clan Lord of Crimson Canine that was in charge of United Army.

“... An-Hyun. Same as you.”

An-Hyun’s blunt reply cause an uproar in Wu Jung-Min’s party. Rather than that, I sharpened my sense. If he really, truly was that Wu Jung-Min, then I could guess who that bow-wielding man was as he was a part of the lower half of the 10 strongest in Hall Plain...

Should I kill him now? But I immediately discarded that idea. If I was alone, I would kill him without hesitation. With the party with me, it was impossible. Before I knew it, both my party and Wu Jung-Min’s party had drawn our weapons.

That thug spoke to An-Hyun dismissively.

“That’s why we can’t treat children with kindness. You said you were An-Hyun? If you don’t want to die, you better fix your manners.”

“Oppa. We don’t have time to fight.”

“This isn’t the first time. We can kill them in an instant, so keep quiet and wait.”

The woman at the centre spoke for the first time but that thug interjected. At this she gave him a terrifying glare, daring him to step out of line. The thug clicked his tongue as he got the woman’s message.

“Ah~. I get it, I get it. Stop glaring at me. Before I eat you alive. Ah. That’s a joke. A joke. Why can’t she take a joke... Never mind. You greenhorns. I am Chun Seun-Hyun. I want to ask you one thing, about these five monkeys, did you kill them?”

“If we did what you going to do about it?”

Chun Seun-Hyun. The moment I see you in Hall Plain, you are dead. Thinking on these murderous thoughts, a clear voice rang through the clearing. The voice was filled with sharp hostility. I prayed that it wasn’t Lee Yu-Jung’s voice. But it was. She had a big ego and seeing an upgrade version of Park Don-Gul, she couldn’t help but butt head with Chun Seun-Hyun. Blinking in surprise, Chun Seun-Hyun laughed and clapped his hands in applause.

“Bwahahaha~. Ha.... Keep it in, keep it in. Keke, you bitch I will let it slide just this once. We aren’t feeling mighty generous right now. And w~e a~r~e rea~lly bu~sy. Kapish? So just answer our questions quickly and we can all say our bye~bye. Ah. Show some manners when you speak~. Well, you don’t really have to. I won’t warn you twice anyways.”

Lee Yu-Jung had that distinctive smirk as Chun Seun-Hyun finished.

“You maniac. No, you imbecile. You won’t give us a warning, so what? You think you are worth something? You poor bastard.”

Lee Yu-Jung’s retort was refreshing as always. In one way, Chun Seun-Hyun was exactly like Park Don-Gul. Seeing her spewing profanities with her gentle face, Chun Seun-Hyun stared at us blankly. Chun Seun-Hyun gave a loud sigh and tightened his grip on his sword. I focused on my right hand.

“These bastards are just like dogs, you have to discipline them for them to obey. Anyways, farewell.”

That trash talking Chun Seun-Hyun suddenly lifted his right arm and threw the sword he was playing with. The sword flew fast and was targeting Lee Yu-Jung’s head. At this point, An-Hyun had given up trying to pull Lee Yu-Jung back and had rather moved quickly with his shield in front. An-Hyun was suspicious of Chun Seun-Hyun from the very beginning, having been firmly gripping on his shield the whole time he managed blocked the sword without problem. And me...

Kang!

Ping! Puk.

“Aaaaaaaa!”

The sword smashed into the shield and fell by the wayside. At the same time, my bolt pierced Chun Seun-Hyun’s right arm. Clutching his right arm, Chun Seun-Hyun screamed in pain. The situation was simple, while An-Hyun was blocking the sword I aimed my crossbow and shot that bastard.

Of course, the other party did not stand still. In an instant, the bow-wielding man had pulled on his bowstring and tried to shoot first but from the ‘Ting’ sound I found that it was an empty draw. With great urgency in my heart, I pulled all the strength I had and in a split second had 3 bolts aimed at the bowman’s head. At the same time, I activated my Third Eye.

< Player Status >

- 1. Name : Seon Yu-Un(Year(s) o)
- 2. Sex : Male(25)
- 3. Height · Weight : 180.9cm · 78.4kg
- 4. Alignment : True · Neutral

[Strength 45] [Resistance 48] [Agility 62] [Vitality 54] [Magic Power 50] [Luck 50]

Click! Chakka!

Seon Yu-Un. It was him without a doubt. With a class as an Archer, he would become one of the most powerful Players in Hall Plain. In that slight delay between firing and rearming the crossbow, we had both managed to aim our weapons at each other's head at the same time. In terms of stat points, there was a huge difference between him and me, but strictly speaking, I was slightly faster. Seon Yu-Un realised that as I could see his eyes trembling.

A cool tension permeated my party. There was a deafening silence and I could feel An-Hyun, Lee Yu-Jung and Kim Han-Byeol gripping their weapons tightly. They all were ready to fight the moment everything went south. In all of this, Chun Seun-Hyun was being a huge distraction as he rolled on the floor screaming.

“Aaaaa, Uaaaak! Kill them! Ya! Kill that fucker now! Kill him!”

“... The person who started this was you. Seun-Hyun. Shut up, you are embarrassing us.”

Chun Seun-Hyun began crying as he was reprimanded by Wu Jung-Min and cradled his right hand. I turned my gaze to Lee Yu-Jung. She was trembling, not having expected Chun Seun-Hyun to

actually throw his sword at her. Wu Jung-Min, who was observing the situation silently from the beginning, looked at Chun Seun-Hyun with contempt before turning toward us.

“Let me apologise first. This has been escalated enough, so why don’t we stop? There is no benefit for either of us.”

“I want to but your side hasn’t dropped your bow.”

“Seon Yu-Un, end this. Release the string and put your bow away.”

Wu Jung-Min put his hand on Seon Yu-Un’s bow and forcefully pushed it down. Catching my eyes, Seon Yu-Un complied and let down his bow. After making sure that they kept their word, I slowly dropped my right arm. Though right now, both I and Seon Yu-Un hadn’t unloaded our bolts or arrow. Wu Jung-Min lifted both his hand and stepped toward my party.

“Sorry. These guys aren’t usually like this but we are in a tight situation right now so we might have been rough. Right now, we want to ask you something... we are really short on time so I will go straight to the main point.”

The party all look at me, even An-Hyun. I nodded slightly.

“What do you want to know?”

“We have been chasing these monkeys till yesterday. For certain

reasons, we left our spot for a short while... during that time one of our member was kidnapped by these monsters. Thank you for taking care of them but did you perhaps saw a girl?”

A woman Player... Perhaps her?

This reminded me of the woman that killed herself after been raped by those monkeys.

“Oppa, could it be that woman with that yellow cloth? With that long hair?”

Giving out a loud sigh, I face palmed. Did this girl ever think before speaking? There was dumb and there was this. I tutted at this thoughtlessly speaking Lee Yu-Jung. Hearing what Lee Yu-Jung said, the other parties faces brightened. The woman who complained about the lack of time was the one who asked us excitedly.

“Yes! She wore a yellow cloth and have long hair! Do you know where she is?”

“Ah... Um...”

Lee Yu-Jung looked bewildered and couldn’t respond properly. We just looked at each other silently without answering them. We were now certain that it was the dead woman that was raped by the monkeys. There was no easy way to tell her that. As we remained silent, the guys in the other party stiffened and guessed

what had happened. However, the woman constantly appealed and begged us.

“Did you pass by on the way here? Or did you at least see her?”

“.....”

“Please. Please. Just tell me where you saw her. She’s my younger sister. She’s really friendly... and innocent... sniff...”

Seeing tears in her eyes, the party looked toward me.

You did so well by yourselves just now but you just have to give me all these complicated situations. Letting out a miserable sigh, I slowly opened my mouth to answer her.

# Chapter 28 - Meeting Some People I Know

## (3/3)

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“We did see a girl on the way here. But we can’t confirm that the person we saw was the same person that was kidnapped.”

I tried to reduce the shock as much as possible but all I could see in the woman’s eyes that she was certain. She nodded quickly and asked again.

“It’s fine I am grasping any thread I can. I can’t be sure about long hair but if she was wearing a yellow one piece, then I am certain it was her.”

“Even if you say it was a yellow one piece... the cloth was in pieces so we aren’t certain.”

“Wa... What?”

She began to stutter. Wu Jung-Min, Seon Yu-Un and Chun Seun-Hyun’s fists were clenched tightly already anticipating what was to come. But her eye’s still held hope. Her voice trembled, trying to deny her premonition.

“Why... why was the cloth torn into pieces?”

“We found the woman collapsed next to a tree. When we checked her... she was already dead.”

“Won Hye-Su...!”

The woman called Won Hye-Su slumped to the ground looking stupor. Chun Seun-Hyun hurried to support her but it was too late as her leg's slumped completely. Everyone could understand loss and seeing Won Hye-Su on the ground, I could only feel pity for her.

Silence permeated the air for a while.

“How did Hye-Yun die?”

Wu Jung-Min seemed to have already accepted reality and asked me with a strong voice. But with misery being reeking into the air, I am sure he was unconsciously trembling inside. I stayed silent for the moment. Though Wu Jung-Min didn't relent and asked me again.

“It's okay. We can guess what happened. Just tell us as you saw it.”

“... We saw blood leaking from her mouth. We think she killed herself by biting off her tongue.”

“Wait. Wait just a moment. That's impossible. There is no way she would kill herself.”

“When we found her, she was almost nude. And... from her genitals we could see those monkey’s semen coming out.”

As I finished the atmosphere became cold. I could see the fury in Wu Jung-Min, rage filled his eyes and his fist was clenched so tightly. I felt he was going to explode any moment. Next, to him, Seon Yu-Un had blood in his eyes due to how angry he was. The feeling of loss and ire could be felt clearly.

Won Hye-Su in her stupor, looking blankly in the sky screamed.

“Ha... Haha.... Ha.... HaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

“Hye-Su! Get a hold of yourself!

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Her denial was so wildly that the impudent Chun Seun-Hyun took a step back. Won Hye-Su kept punching the ground, screaming as she fell deeper into denial.

“Impossible! Hye-Yun! Hye-Yun isn’t dead! It’s a lie! A lie! Hye-YuuunAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

“Won Hye-Su! Snap out of it! We lost Jin-Tae as well. Don’t you remember? You told us to keep a hold of ourselves and face reality. So how can you do this now!”

“Shut up! Hye-Yun! Hye-Yun is!”

She looked around wildly and then caught my eyes. Her lips were pursed in anger as she suddenly stood up and ran toward me wildly. Shocked, Seon Yu-Un and Chun Seun-Hyun grabbed onto her arms but she still screamed curses at me.

“A lie! Stop lying! There is no way she’s dead! You are lying, right? Right? Say you lied...! Say it, say iiiitttaaaAAAAAA!”

“Hye-Su... Let’s go check for ourselves. So stay calm.”

Chun Seun-Hyun tried to comfort her but Won Hye-Su was already half mad. Staring dazedly at her, I spoke in a soft voice.

“The corpse is that way about 30 minutes by walking. There aren’t many trees there. I am sorry about your sister.”

“You evil bastard! Did you kill Hye-Yun! Huh, did you!?! Stop lying! No. You must have run away like a coward when you saw Hye-Yun being attacked. You ran away when you could have saved her! You fucking coowaaarddddDDDDD!”

“What? You crazy bitch... Oppa?”

While Lee Yu-Jung felt bad for her, it seems she couldn’t handle Won Hye-Su swearing at me. I put my hand on her shoulder and shook my head. Lee Yu-Jung looked frustrated but seeing my grim demeanour she pulled back. Wu Jung-Min who had been staring

absently into the sky, raise his right hand.

Clap!

Won Hye-Su, who had been pouring curses at me, was slapped. Her cheek was red with her expression filled with disbelief, looking at Wu Jung-Min's hand. Wu Jung-Min looked disappointed as he looked down at Won Hye-Su.

“Stop, Won Hye-Su. This is appalling.”

“Wha, what?”

“Face reality... Hu, this isn't it. You probably won't hear whatever I say right now. Stop venting your anger and face what happened.”

“Ha.... Yeah. Forget it. It's because she isn't your sister, right~. Yeah. She might just be a girl you met for four days, but, but, but! I am different. We have been together for 20 years! So what? Face reality?”

Won Hye-Su spoke with a maliciously childish voice as she looked at Seon Yu-Un pitifully. Unable to withstand her gaze, Seon Yu-Un turned away. Won Hye-Su started to sob once more. Even my Third Eye would say she was mad right now, her disappointment, frustration, fear and confusion.

“Won Hye-Su, have you gone insane? You know me who threw

the sword would sound like a hypocrite but you can't do this! Calm down and snap out of it. Why are you like this?"

"Yeah, I am crazy. I rather be crazy right now. So let me go. I said let me go!"

Her hysteria became worse. Wu Jung-Min let out a loud sigh and spoke in a heavy tone.

"I don't think you are crazy. We lost Jin-Tae as well, so we know how it feels like losing your cherished sister. Anyone who saw your relationship for the past four days will understand what you are going through. And... this person hasn't proven it was Won Hye-Yun yet."

"Yeah, they could be lying to us. They said they only saw part of her cloth. I want to go right now. I am going to go now. Its... it definitely won't be her. There is just no way."

Human's were called rational animals. But Won Hye-Su did an 180 away from her rational thoughts. She had begged, then denied, then was filled with anger and then became hopeful. It was exactly as they said, she was going crazy. Won Hye-Su rejected all talks of her sister's death and only held hope that she was still alive. It's not the first time I saw someone going through this but I was not completely apathetic to it.

"Stop. You saw Hye-Yun being taken by those monkey monsters."

“If you are not going with me, then I will go alone. So let me go. I need to go. I need to go right now.”

“... Jung-Min. Let the two of us go for now. Check it for ourselves... see if the corpse....”

Chun Seun-Hyun spoke cautiously but feeling Won Hye-Su’s glare he stopped speaking. When Chun Seun-Hyun released his hold on Won Hye-Su, she began running in the direction I indicated before. The guys in the party looked awkwardly at each other and then swiftly followed after her. Though Wu Jung-Min stayed where he was.

“Sorry for troubling you like this. I have only been with them for four days but Won Hye-Su and Won Hye-Won were inseparable.”

An-Hyun nodded sympathetically. He was holding An-Sol tightly with his right arm, troubled by what he just saw. Wu Jung-Min looked bitter as he turned to turned his eyes on me.

“Thank you for avenging her. For lifting your hand. But... you aren’t lying to us right?”

“What?”

Wu Jung-Min had suddenly turned aggressive and searched everyone’s expression. Then he just smiled and spoke again.

“Well... you don’t look like the type to lie. Then excuse me, I

have to head out now.”

“Let me express my sympathies once again. Unfortunately, we are busy as well so we will depart now.”

“Ah, wait. You with the crossbow. Come here for a bit.”

Being stopped suddenly, I turned to face him. I slowly walked toward him. Wu Jung-Min lowered his voice, making sure only I could hear what he was about to say.

“It’s not much of a compensation but... let me tell you one piece of information. Are you going to the Central Warp Gate, right? Don’t answer, just nod slightly.”

As I nodded, Wu Jung-Min whispered quietly in my ear.

## Chapter 29 - Why Are You Doing This? (1/2)

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“Is your party perhaps also going to the Warp Gate at the centre?”

“I’m not making this up. You won’t make it. Don’t go there. We were able to reach Warpgate two days ago. But we failed at 300 meters. Why? We stumbled about, hesitating what to do. Then we decided to retreat. If we made that decision a little quicker than ... Jin-tae would still be...”

“ ... ”

“You know the about the conditions to survive right? It’s for the best to hold on for seven days. Your party will never be able to beat that thing. If it weren’t for Jin-tae, we would all have been killed by that monster. We were quite a distant from the monster but it knew exactly where we were.”

“That monster...”

\*\*\*\*

The conditions for the Boss monster appearing was dependent on the time stayed in each Points. There was also a chance for random appearance but frankly it was unpredictable. Rather than the Boss monster appearing near the Warp Gate, I was more surprised by the fact that the group managed to reached Warp Gate in three days and managed to survive the encounter.

The situation was quite credible as Wu Jung-min and Seon Yu-un reputation would resound all over Hall Plane in the future. The crying face of Won Hye-su came up in my mind. She heaped curses on me while looking at me but this didn't offend me.

Because I knew so well what it was like to lose a precious person. I was in the exact same position as her back then. After losing Hyung and her, I went crazy for a while. If I collected all the blood I spilt during that time, it could probably fill a few swimming pools.

“An-Hyun.”

While walking along I could hear Lee Yu-jung calling for An-hyun. As An-Hyun lifted his head to respond, she whispered rather than talk with her usually loud voice.

“Thank you”

“For what?”

“... For saving me back there.”

An-hyun tilted his head and remember, “Aha.” Nodding his head as he recalled shielding her.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Anyway, your temper is a problem. Kill your temper for a bit and let us live in peace.

If I wasn't wary of the guy from the start you would be stuck with a sword in your head."

"He was so frustrating!"

"It's what it is. Why don't you try putting at least half the effort Hyung puts into treating others? Or try to resemble half of Han-byeol's personality. What's the point of having a pretty face, when your personality is like a dog."

"Ha... Half? Really...? Ah.... Hu, Hmph! Su-hyun Oppa is suffering so much because of us. I hate it."

Yu-jung turned bright red when An-hyun called her pretty and looked away quickly. An-hyun's looked on surprised at this seemingly girlish act from Yu-jung. This much was a great development already, no arguments had broken out to my great relief.

An-sol who was listening to the conversation between two tightened her grip on An-Hyun's collar and An-hyun automatically reached out and stroked her hair gently. Seeing the smirk on An-sol's face, Lee Yu-jung eye's became sharp. Only the dull An-hyun missed the silent feud surrounding him and was striding forward with careful alertness. Why is it that all the popular men were so block-headed? Tsk, tsk.

We walked at a fast pace for a while and was able to see the Safe Point just as the sun was about to set. And we did not encounter a single monster on the way. The party was happy with our lucky break but this was not something to be delighted about.

We have always been attacked by monsters, except for the short while in the City, after leaving the forest. In serious circumstances, An-sol usually screamed like when she saw the bodies of the Mankeys. I had intentionally led the party into monsters encounters and they were reaping the reward for their efforts.

There were reasonably intelligent monsters surrounding the vicinity of the Warp Gate. Mankey's were one of the toughest monsters in the Rite of Passage and the party managed to kill five of them. These intelligent monsters probably knew by know that many monsters have been killed by our party. Their sensitive sense of smell allowing them to sniff the dry blood on us.

This was my theory before my whispered conversation with Wu Jung-min. If the Boss monster had been summoned and was wandering around the Warp Gate, all the monsters would have fled that region by now as the Boss monster was on the top of the food chain.

In other words, if we do not encounter any monsters on the way there tomorrow, it was mostly likely we would confront the Boss monsters in front of Warp Gate like Wu Jung-min's party. It was an ironic situation. We left the City to avoid the Boss monster but we were now throwing ourselves back into the fire.

Of course, there were differences between the two situations. The chance of Boss encounter in the City was 100% but the Boss encounter at the Warp Gate wasn't so certain.

I thought for a while and a question popped in my head. Conditions definitely existed which defined the perimeters for the Boss monster's appearance. And there were many survivors in the Rite of Passage besides us. If so, there was a chance that the perimeters for the Boss monster's appearance were met simultaneously by two or three different groups at the same time. What would happen in such cases? Plus, the situation became even more complicated factoring the high probability of Boss monster appearing near the Warp Gate.

Suddenly I felt like I knew very little about the Rites of Passage. I spent 10 years scraping through Hall Plain and researching everything about it but the Rite of Passage was not part of my research. The only part I remembered was times when other Players occasionally joking about their experiences of their Rite of Passage. Though it was not to the extreme, I still felt quite frustrated.

How much time had passed? We walked for a while and we were soon able to reach the Safe Point.

"It has a yellow roof. But it looks like a hut."

"Thank god we found one today. It's still a bit early but let's rest here for today. Hyung, is that fine?"

“Don’t stay over a day. The warning sign is here as well. It’s better than last time, right Oppa?”

“I will go in first. I want to wash up quickly and have a change of clothes. Hehe.”

“.....”

“Hyung?”

“Oppa?”

“Huh? Uh, yeah. Let’s.”

Hastily answered back, everyone gave me a strange look. I shook my head telling them nothing was wrong.

The party continued to stare for a moment before they returned to their chattering again, and I sighed inside. Immature kids. It was because of this that I was uncomfortable being in a party. If I was alone, I would have already entered Hall Plain. No matter how I pondered, there was no decent plan I could think up so I decided to put this matter aside for now.

I realised then that I had become quite relaxed.

In the past where I did not know much and tried my best to survive all the life and death situation crouching on my doorsteps.

But it was different now. The idea of cutting down all problems in my way was deeply engraved in a corner of my heart.

“Oppa, what are you doing? We are going to go in first!”

“... I will be there now.”

I slowly headed in after Yu-jung waved her hand enthusiastically. For now, tomorrow’s problem was for tomorrow.

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The night was dark. I was sitting on the stairs leading up to the hut for the watch. It was no longer just me and An-hyun that watched through the night. Now the four of us, An-hyun, Kim Han-byeol, and Yu-jung would rotate our watch. We did keep exact time but if we thought enough time has passed we would call for the next person for the watch.

The first person to watch was Lee Yu-jung and I was next to her. The third was Kim Han-byeol, and the last person was An-hyun. One person kept watching for about 2 hours, though I was certain it couldn’t have been more than 1 hour before Lee Yu-jung came and ask me to take over the shift.

Yup. Seeing her avoiding my eyes as she asked to change shift, she must be feeling guilty about it.

I put my hand into my pocket as it was my habit, and felt a

chocolate bar inside. Lee Yu-jung had shoved it into my grasp as an apology. Seems she kept some of the chocolate in secret for herself. There wasn't any lack of food or water so I didn't say anything about it. It was about time to change shift with Han-byeol anyways so it seemed to be a good time for a snack before heading back in.

As I tried to open the plastic wrappings, I felt a can of coffee on my right cheek. Turning to see, I saw Kim Han-byeol hunched over staring at me.

“I see you are hiding food and eating it alone.”

“... I got this from Yu-jung.”

“That's just like her, though I never saw her concede any chocolates before.”

“She didn't keep her time. I think she gave it to me as an apology.”

Smiling wryly, Kim Han-byeol sat next to me. Snapping the chocolate bar in half, I gave it to her.

“Thank you.”

“Thank's for the coffee.”

Kim Han-byeol was more comfortable with my presence now

since I wasn't as rowdy as Lee Yu-jung. Though there was still a distance between us, it felt it was slightly reduced. In the party, only we were still speaking with honorifics. Having done this since the beginning, it had become something of a tacit agreement.

“What were you thinking so hard about, you look glum. You didn't even notice me coming behind you.”

I know you were coming, I just pretended not to. Drinking some coffee, I replied.

“Haha, I was out of it for a while. You said I look glum?”

“Yes. You looked tense after speaking something with that man. Was I wrong...”

Was it? I thought I had a good poker face. Rubbing my face unconsciously, Kim Han-byeol tuck on confidently.

“What did he say?”

“... It wasn't anything important.”

“It wasn't only me that felt it. An-hyun Oppa, Yu-jung Unni and An-sol all feel nervous. You haven't said anything after your conversation with that man.”

“I was thinking this and that. Everything will sort itself out, I am

sure of it. Even if something happens, we will pull through so don't worry."

I finished off the chocolate bar and the rest of the coffee in one gulp. Why was it that the more I talked to her, the more I remember of 'her.' I wanted to get away quickly. I told her to keep well and was about to climb up the stairs to the hut.

"Please wait. I want to ask you something."

In novels, manhwa and drama the girl usually just let the guy go without any issue... Why wasn't she following the trope? I felt Kim Han-byeol was ready to tackle another issue and I screamed inside. I should have seen this coming when Kim Han-byeol wanted to trade her shift with An-hyun. I tried to look friendly as I could as I tried to escape.

"I am a bit tired. If it isn't urgent is it possible to talk about this tomorrow? I want to go in and sleep."

"I want to ask you something now."

"I am not running away anywhere."

With the conversation becoming more seriously, I tried throwing in a joke but it wasn't well received. Kim Han-byeol staring at me with her usual cold expression. Again, Kim Han-byeol's face overlapped with 'her.' I unconsciously avoided her gaze.

“I feel like if I don’t ask you this today, I will never have the chance.”

“Ah, was it that question you asked back then? It really wasn’t anything...”

“Oppa.”

I closed my mouth immediately. Did I just hear her call me Oppa? Don’t misunderstand, I wasn’t a pervert who enjoyed being called Oppa.

“Su-hyun Oppa. That’s not the question I wanted to ask.”

Kim Han-byeol’s face was still cold and calm but it was giving off a different impression than normal. She was angry right now. Don’t run away, that was the impression she was exuding as she looked at me. I realised that she was being absolutely serious right now. Following suit, I began to observe her calmly. And then she asked her question.

## Chapter 30 - Why Are You Doing This? (2/2)

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“Remember when we discovered that hut and Oppa went out to explore the area? We talked about Oppa amongst ourselves.”

“What did you all talk about?”

“About the survivors, we met today. Remember that man who threw his sword at Yu-jung Unni and Oppa hit his hand with your bolt?”

I nodded. Back then, I was preparing for the worst outcome. If Wu Jung-min and Seon Yu-un was going to fight us to death, there was a chance that one or two of the party member dying if I didn't show my true ability. That's why I was prepared to take out one of the guys before a fight could begin.

“And An-hyun Oppa blocked the sword with his shield.”

“Yeah.”

“Everyone praised An-hyun Oppa, saying he was amazing, thanking him. But do you know what they said about you Oppa?”

“.....”

I had a faint idea what she wanted to speak about but I did not want to hear it. Before I could speak, she preempted.

“No one spoke about it but it was clear that everyone was surprised. An-sol was on the verge of tears because she was afraid. An-hyun Oppa and Yu-jung Unni was shocked to an extent. That’s not all. They don’t like how straight forward you were with that woman.”

“Hmm. I see.”

I nodded calmly which made Kim Han-byeol look at me incredulously.

“It’s not okay. Isn’t this unfair? It’s to protect Unni, or you don’t have the right to speak to me this way when you forced me to take over everything. Don’t you at all feel this way?”

Was it? I must have been too deep in thought to notice this subtle change in the party. I wasn’t at all disappointed and didn’t want to spend the effort thinking about this issue. It didn’t matter as when we entered Hall Plain, early or later, there will come a time when they have to kill.

Kim Han-byeol tone showed her frustration at my current easygoing nature.

“Oppa, you always worry and think alone. You try to handle all the difficult task alone. I know Oppa doesn’t have any bad intentions.”

“I think there is some kind of misunderstanding. Can you hold on...”

“I didn’t mean this as any misunderstanding. I have told you this before but Oppa’s judgement was always dependable. I still think so.”

Hearing Kim Han-byeol’s words I felt a rock sinking in my heart. After leaving the city I saw her staring at me vacantly. Especially when An-hyun and I were discussing what to do next. I didn’t think much would come out of it so I left it alone but today I been thoroughly trapped by Kim Han-byeol.

“It isn’t so. We...”

“Oppa. Speak comfortably.”

I stopped my fumbling as Kim Han-byeol cut into my words. I looked at her with wide eyes, seeing her shooting me a dissatisfied expression.

“Uh, yes?”

“Talk more crudely. You speak comfortably with Unni and Oppa but why are you so polite with me?”

“... Okay.”

Though it was for a moment, I had lost my nerve. Me, me that was a Player in Hall Plain for ten years...

I give up. Whenever I see Kim Han-byeol, my heart shakes as I remember Han So-yung. One couldn't dismiss her Unique Ability Charisma. Whenever I see Kim Han-byeol I felt a subtle emotion rising in my heart. So much so, that her image resembled someone so closely from the beginning.

Clearing my throat I continue where she cut me off.

"I haven't always laid down the decisions. You, me, An-hyun, Ansol. We are all thinking this through."

"Please don't lie. You at least have some decency seeing you didn't include Yu-jung Unni."

"Isn't Hyun struggling more? He was quite amazing fighting those monkeys today."

"You are doing it again. This might work on An-hyun Oppa or Yu-jung Unni but please don't do it to me. Please don't try to change the topic like that. Me and An-hyun Oppa barely managed to kill two of those by working together. But Oppa kills two of them alone and if that wasn't enough you even helped Yu-jung Unni's fight."

Han-byeol prickled my sensitive spot. The resemblance was really there. I couldn't take her lightly. The gazes she held on me at

times was in the end, gazes that was monitoring me. She had only approached me now after preparing firmly as possible.

I sighed deeply inside. I decided to hear her out a little bit more and if it wasn't going the way I liked I would throw her a fastball.

“It's always like this. In the forest, in the City and even when we met those strangers today. You are always in the background but when it gets really dangerous Oppa steps in. If you assume us to be one team, the leader and the pillar is Oppa. Not An-hyun Oppa, you. So I was furious. Why Oppa has to listen to those words.”

‘Was she doing this for me?’

“Perhaps. But I disagree. An-hyun is superb, he is motivated, driven, and decisive. And you don't need to think so deeply about it. Because if you think about it, we are all leaders, and Rite of Passage is a place where cooperation is important.

“Please stop. Why are you doing this Oppa?”

“I don't get what you really want to tell me.”

Even when I said I didn't know, my heart was tingling. I was not able to meet Kim Han-byeol's cold silent eyes anymore. There was a cold chill around her but I felt like an even greater storm approaching. It was getting bad.

“Stop lying! The person who is truly making the decision and

leading us is you! You let An-hyun Oppa handle all the easy incidents while taking care of all the difficult situation by yourself. Why is everyone only thanking An-hyun Oppa and saying his amazing? Why are they all afraid of you when you take care of all the dirty work? And why are you trying to hide all of this?"

"You..."

"At this rate, Oppa will do the same thing in again and again. And there's the chance that the same is likely to happen again. The important thing is that behind the scenes we are all depending on you. No one will oppose you, so please Oppa, be our team leader. If there are difficult problems ahead that you are trying to solve by yourself, or talking amongst everyone else, please be involved. If Oppa is the leader, no one will complain."

Kim Han-byeol was almost begging me now. Honestly, I still couldn't grasp on my bewilderment. If the person in front of me was Lee Yu-jung, I would just smile and pass over the issue knowing that it was her personality shining through. Though I just couldn't get an accurate impression of Kim Han-byeol. I was still mulling in my head what she had just spoken.

Our standoff continued and the chill of the dawn seeped into our bodies. However, Kim Han-byeol had no intention of leaving. No, rather she had no intention of letting me go without hearing my answer.

Biting my lips, I mulled it over and slowly opened my mouth to answer her.

“I...”

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The morning of the sixth day was bright. An-hyun, who was responsible for the last shift of the night watch, woke everyone up to begin preparation for our departure. My joints were quite stiff and my face felt sore with fatigue. I had hardly slept last night, having spent more time with my eyes open than close but my body could handle one sleepless night.

“Good morning. Did you sleep well?”

I had deliberately greeted her brightly in the morning. An-sol was startled at my greeting. She ducked her face, looking uneasy, and ran away. Before I would just laugh at this apparent shyness but have that happen right in front of me, I let out a bitter smile.

Having discovered this, An-hyun scolded An-sol for her lack of manners. Her head was down again, on the verge of tears. Then Lee Yu-jung came and comforted her. Lee Yu-jung started another squabble with An-hyun and with An-sol trapped in between she didn't know what to do.

Stepping back, I watched the scene quietly. Warm. It was really a warm scene. Looking at the three, it would be fine to say the three were all siblings. This scene was warm and comforting enough to forget the hell that was the Rite of Passage.

But I had no place within that scene. I knew that truth better than anyone. They and I were fundamentally different people. When I slaughtered a hundred people in the past, this was what I thought. That I might no longer be human. Drunk in their moment, it was possible they may have forgotten about me.

‘If people who knew me in the past saw me now, they would probably faint in shock.’

I couldn’t help but laugh at this self-ridicule. Remembering the murky past, I felt a bit melancholic. Clueless about my state, An-hyun smiles happily as he approached me. Hearing the grumbling behind An-hyun, it seems that An-hyun was the winner of their verbal fight.

“Hyung. Do you think we can reach this War Gate thing today?”

“... Yeah.”

“Then let’s get there quick. We don’t know if this might be our last meal here, so what do you think about a hearty breakfast? Hyung you need to eat a lot.”

I grinned hearing An-hyun speak so impudently. I shook my head at his suggestion of breakfast.

“No thanks, I am fine. Eat today’s breakfast amongst yourselves.”

“What? But...”

“I have a habit of skipping meals on an important day. It can keep the mind sharp you see.”

An-hyun nodded begrudgingly and turned to face Kim Han-byeol. She still had that cold expression as she stared off into empty space. Suddenly the conversation I shared with Kim Han-byeol rose in the forefront of my mind.

“Han-byeol about breakfast...”

“I am not going to eat.”

“Huh? Don’t be like that...”

“No.”

Without hearing An-hyun till the end, Kim Han-byeol cut him off with short answers. An-sol looked surprised by this spectacle as she fidgets by playing with her fingers. An-hyun looked on awkwardly between me and Kim Han-byeol before laughing bashfully and scratching his head. Lee Yu-jung, who was watching from the back, spoke cautiously unwilling to poke the awkward atmosphere.

“Ahaha... Then the three of us will eat.”

“ ... ”

“Uh, nothing we can do. There is just more for us. Hoho... ho. Oppa, Han-byeol, we are really going to eat all of this... ?”

Of course, me and Kim Han-byeol was silent. Lee Yu-jung was shocked by our silence, opening and closing her mouth. I felt Kim Han-byeol shifting her gaze onto me. But I had no intention to face her and dismissed it. This just made the atmosphere one step colder.

An exciting morning of this sixth day.

After breakfast, the three people began to be more cautious around the other two.

# Chapter 31 - Boss Monster (1/4)

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The day was clear. The sun shined brightly on our backs, caressing our heads with its rays. While it wasn't a bad mood per se, no one spoke and just kept walking.

It has been six hours since we departed from the hut. Since then, we only conversed on important issues but otherwise remained silent. The mood between me and Kim Han-byeol was cold but that wasn't the only thing the party was looking at.

Anyways. After having hiked for so long, they should be getting tired. But we didn't rest and kept on walking.

I wonder how much have we traveled?

Soon enough we were about halfway there and an impossibly humongous Warp Gate came into our sights. It was like everyone made a pledge to keep their silence as we got closer and closer to the Warp Gate. The only thing I could hear was their shallow breathing.

Everyone seems excited by the prospect of the finish line.

You could reach the destination full of excitement but in return, it was impossible to be relaxed. As I expected, we did not encounter any monsters on our path to the Warp Gate. With the lack of monsters, everyone seemed unconsciously lax.

But my heart was uneasy. If the Boss monster appeared, there would be no time at all to organise ourselves. The Boss monster could appear suddenly like a ghost if it got a whiff of our position. As long as we weren't separated in the confusion, it would be fine. Even though I was here, if I didn't reveal my true abilities, there would definitely be casualties.

The Warp Gate was in front of our eyes. Just a bit more and we would successfully complete the Rite of Passage. With the small distance left, it felt like a waste to abandon our concepts and plans.

By my rough approximations, there was about 600 meters left to the Warp Gate. Wu Jung-min was attacked by the Boss monster at about 300 meters. Half our distance more and we would meet the same fate. I wanted to walk slowly and think of a plan but with our footsteps becoming faster, it was going contrary to my desires. An-hyun feeling the fast pace, finally broke his silence and spoke to An-sol.

“Sol, just a little bit more. If we can reach that big oval building, I am sure we can escape from this scary place. Until then, just hang on.”

“Okay!”

Hearing An-hyun's gentle voice, An-sol brightened and nodded energetically. Seeing such a rare smile on An-sol's face, she must be quite happy right now. I was about to ask everyone to rest for a moment before continuing but I kept quiet. I couldn't think of any good excuse. I obligingly met their pace and as time passed, we got closer to the Warp Gate.

Of course, it could be pointless worries on my part. The best thing to do was enter the Warp Gate as calmly as possible. A happy path where no one was hurt or injured. Still, that feeling of foreboding did not disappear, it was lodged in the corner of my heart. Since entering the Rite of Passage, I conducted an extensive and minute observation with my Magic Detection, yet I couldn't find a hint of the Boss monster.

In no time at all we were 500 meters from our goal. The Warp Gate gradually revealed its commanding presence. Upright altars were supporting the oval like structures, its grandness could match any tall buildings. And at its centre was a large doughnut like hole, with a spherical blue light floating in it. The fine blue current flowing through the Warp Gate was definitely the magic power driving the spell.

The outward appearance was an exquisite marble and all our eyes were drawn to it. An-sol was innocently admiring it while Kim Han-byeol looked at it with twinkling eyes, finding it to her satisfaction. Lee Yu-jung couldn't take her eye off the bright light emanating from the marble structure as she continues to gaze at it with a stupefied expression.

“It's really pretty... I want to chisel it out and make earrings. It would look really nice on my ears. I want it.”

“Unni. I like it just the way it is. It's a beautiful masterpiece.”

An-hyun looked deep in thought as Lee Yu-jung and An-sol were

sharing a friendly conversation. He must be thinking about how Yu-jung would look with such earrings. After a while, he shook his head and spoke.

“It’s would be horrific.”

“Huh? What do you mean by that Hyun...?”

“I found it a bit funny about you want something like that as earrings. I think it will suit Sol better.”

“What’s that?!”

At An-hyun’s indifferent comment, Yu-jung flew off into rage and kicked him on his hips. An-sol’s mouth was slightly ajar after hearing that the earrings would suit her better. The mood of the scene wasn’t so bad. An-sol had a slightly shy smile on her face. An-hyun had all the qualities to become a Harem King but it was unfortunate that he was a sison. Finding myself going off tangent, I laughed unconsciously.

400 meters left. Looking around, the surrounding had a very similar environment as our starting point. Here and there, there were few grass roots growing but it was mostly bare soil. Some parts of the earth were darker colour and when we stepped on it, the darker soil felt harder than the soft lighter soil. Was the soil soaked in blood and had hardened?

If it was, it probably was the Players that had reached the Warp

Gate before us who had been attacked. The only person who realised this gruesome truth was me but I kept my silence and kept on walking.

300 meters left. Our pace was fast enough that we were now literally running. We did it, we survived, those emotions bled through in the party's expressions. An-hyun and Yu-jung who moments before were snarling at each other now were smiling at each other. An-sol laughed openly and Han-byeol maintained her unperturbed countenance though she did seem relieved.

Dashing through the 300-meter mark, the Boss monster had yet to appear. In the end, it seems Wu Jung-min's party was just unlucky. I felt it would be alright as our party had An-sol who boasted 100 Luck points. The last few meters, it was in these few instances when I felt nothing with my detection and was about to let my magic subside.

I didn't know what but what I did realise was that we had opened the champagne too early.

Pachzz! Paacchzz!

After passing the 200-meter mark, I heard a crackling sound in the air. The air current changed and space began to contort in a bizarrely manner. It was a phenomenon which occurred when something large moved through magic. The party stopped, feeling unease. I quickly activated my Third Eye.

The space was washed with unexpected mana waves. To the

untrained eyes, it may look like the mana was dispersing but at a closer look, it was all moving in one direction. I kept calm and tried to analyse the pattern the magic was drawing on the ground

A loud sound reverberated through the air and a large shape began to appear on the path we were walking on. When I saw the Magic Circle, it suddenly clicked. It was an Advanced Summoning Magic. I quickly sent out my mana to destroy the circle but...

I was too late. The completed Circle rose into the air and began to shine brightly.

Was this it? Did the Boss monster appear through summoning magic? We all looked at the Magic Circle in the air with a stupefied expression. Without a doubt, they could clearly see the Magic Circle as well. But no one spoke. The Magic Circle exuded evil and foreboding.

Wuuuuung! Wuuuung!

Finally, the Magic Circle began the summoning process. The first thing we could see was the Boss monster's face and its fingers. Its face was grotesque, elongated without eyes and from its jagged mouth, sharp teeth protruded. One could mistake the monster's fingers for large scythes. Its pitch black steel like carapace came out with a large tail stuck to it.

The summoning spell finished and the monster that showed up was over 5 meters tall.

The Boss monster had appeared.

Geck, geck, geck, geck. Gulp!

Blood was splattered on the Boss monster's mouth as if it had just finished eating. As if it's meal wasn't enough, the monster smacked its lips while looking at our direction.

I immediately sought out my party. It was admirable they hadn't fled in sheer terror but Lee Yu-jung, Kim Han-byeol and An-sol were in a state of panic. Their body looked frozen in spot, unable to move at all. They were all overwhelmed by the bloodlust emanating from the monster.

Only An-hyun alone looked at the monster in disbelief.

"Thi... Impossible... Just what..."

GRAAAAAAAAH!

An-hyun couldn't complete his sentence as the Boss monster roar swept through our bodies. Being hit by the roar filled with bloodlust, their bodies should be prickling all over. As if they were released from a magic spell, the party wavered but could only take a step or two. There was no time to dawdle. I spoke to everyone in a low but clear voice.

"Don't get distracted. Don't panic and keep calm."

“Hy, hyung... it’s impossible. This much is impossible. We can’t win. We need to get away!”

An-hyun replied in a shaky voice after he saw me aim my crossbow at the monster. The overpowering aura coming off from the Boss monster made him lose the will to fight. Shouting and spurring him on in this situation would only cause panic. I had no intention to fight it with the party in the first place. Lightly using mana on my voice, I allayed their stiffened bodies.

“I’m not saying we are going to fight. Fighting that thing is crazy. Like you said we are going to run for it. But if we run without a goal, we are going to get killed one by one. That’s why we are going to run toward the Warp Gate.”

“Y, yes. At once...”

Yu-jung was gasping for breath as she agreed with me. Inside I sighed in relief. An-hyun and Han-byeol seemed to have gradually overcome the bloodlust, though feeble, I could see the desire to live in their eyes. Putting my faith into the magic that was supported my body till now, I spoke up confidently. They all believed I had a workable plan.

“Everyone, throw away your weapons. We are going to lighten ourselves and run towards the Warp Gate.”

“Eh, eh...?”

The Boss monster roared once again. We were now truly out of time. I felt frustrated when I saw An-sol looking around bewildered. Walking to her, I forcefully flung the bag on her back and spoke.

“An-hyun! Drop your sword and shield! Are you going to run with that?”

“Yes... Yes!”

An-hyun, Yu-jung and Han-byeol threw away all their belongings and weapons. But the Boss monster was running on all four legs towards us. With it's every step, there was a loud “Boom” that followed by a mini-earthquake.

Using the first earthquake as a signal, I grabbed An-sol's hand and started to run. The party followed suit and we all began to run full speed towards the Warp Gate.

We ran. Ran and ran and ran. We ran with all our strength but the sound of the monster stomping became louder. I saw an anxious Yu-jung trying to look back.

“Don't think about looking back. Only keep your focus on whats ahead of you.”

The Boss monster was summoned about 300 meters from the Warp Gate. We were 200 meters from the Warp Gate. There was a

100-meter difference between us but I was certain it would catch up to us. It was my goal to overcome this eventuality. It felt like the Boss monster was gaining more speed as it ran but if I could stop him temporarily then the monster would lose all momentum.

Stopping the monster once would force it to build up its speed again, chasing us with its initial slow speed. We could use this chance to enter the Warp Gate. I readied my grip on my crossbow.

Boom!

180 meters remaining.

Boom! Boom!

160 meters remaining.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Remaining distance, 140 meters. The interval of the stomping sound became shorter and we could all feel the monster's speed increasing. Even if we kept up our speed, it was only a matter of time before the Boss monster caught up. I felt that the time had come. While everyone was focused on running, I took this opportunity to slip in a unit of mana into the crossbow bolt. It would be impossible to pierce through the monster's steel like carapace with a normal arrow.

When the mana transfer was completed, there was a feeling of

sharpness that wasn't there on my left wrist before. The preparation was complete. It was finally my time to step up. My hesitation might cause an irreversible situation. I stopped my legs from moving and I let go of An-sol's hand.

An-sol's screamed in horror as she passed my abruptly still form. Everyone stiffened slightly but before they could turn their heads towards me I spoke out loudly.

“Don't look back, keep running!”

They were all alarmed at hearing my angry voice for the first time. After I made sure that their hesitant faces turned back to face the front, I immediately turned to face the monster. The monster saw its first target. And I promptly raised my left arm toward the monster.

## Chapter 32 - Boss Monster (2/4)

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I stretched my left arm towards the monster, with its disgusting teeth bared towards me. On my crossbow, I can shoot 3 bolts consecutively and with the bolts sharpened with mana, it had the power to pierce through iron.

Aim. Fire.

Ping! Ping! Ping!

The bolts cut through the air with a loud shriek. In a little while, it homed in and pierced the monster on its head. But...

Tung! Tung! Tung!

The bolts I fired clanged futilely against the monster, it could not penetrate the Boss monster's skin. But that did not mean it did no damage. The Boss monster flinched as the magic reverberated internally throughout its body.

Though the bolt held a sliver of magic, it was several times stronger than normal. Yet the effect on the Boss monster was minimal. I began to seriously contemplate what the Angel was thinking putting such a thing in the Rite of Passage. But with the bolts, I fulfilled my purpose. The Boss monster had stalled.

The Boss monster reeled in the aftershock and it curled on itself further. Deciding to ask Seraph about the overpowered Boss later, I

turned and ran after my party. They were still running as hard as they could. There were only a 100 meters left between the party and the Warp Gate. While I wasn't certain about my chances, the party was safe now.

Starting my run, I felt as if something was wrong. I hadn't inflicted much of a wound and the monster should have recovered already. But I couldn't hear the monster stomping after us. I suddenly recalled the Mankey from the battle yesterday. The Boss monster had curled up in a similar fashion. I heard the wind being buffeted behind me as I began to suspect what it was preparing to do.

Whoosh!

My suspicion became a reality. The Boss monster was quite shrewd and cautious, already having come to the realisation that at this rate it wouldn't manage to capture one of us. When the monster curled up, it wasn't due to the shock but rather it was preparing to jump.

A large shadow covered the whole area. The Boss monster was now ahead of me, leering at the still running party. An-hyun was at the forefront, while Han-byeol and Yu-jung were right behind him. An-sol was several steps behind, lacking the stamina to catch up. The three in the front might be fine but An-sol was within a dangerous distance from the Boss monster.

I didn't even have a chance to shout out a warning. The Boss monster arced and landed just behind An-hyun and the party. The ground shook and loud cracking peal rang out, creating a strong

tremor that staggered An-hyun. A white static noise filled my head as I observed this scene.

And at that moment, a message appeared in front of my eyes.

Latent Ability Mind’s Eye (Rank: A Plus) was invoked.

Seeing beyond the outward appearance, a mind’s eye to see the target’s inner being. Self-contemplation, the observation of all creation, the ability to detect or call forth similar phenomenon. With the heart governed by an iron fist, the principal can keep calm under the influence of mental pollution magic below S Rank.

....

.....

.....

“Hu.....”

The burning sensation in my head quickly cooled in an instant. That white, blanked mind was starting to spin with cold rational reason. My previously narrow view began to expand and I saw things that I couldn’t have seen before.

And then, I laughed. I laughed out loud.

What was it that I was worrying about till now? This was insignificant to I, who had face greater hardship and pain. I had no fear, pushing myself to the utmost limit. I tried my best within the boundaries of possibility. This was my creed I lived by the first time I played Hall Plain.

There was no time for weakness in Hall Plain. People had perished before they could bloom because they showed off their strength and abilities. I vowed to never expose myself like these people. I lived in complete obscurity, where no one knew I was a Sword Master with nothing more than 48 Magic points. Having operated with such compulsive concept for ten years in Hall Plain, it had become a habit.

If obscurity was still required, I would follow through with it. But then, nothing would be different. Using the same method would beget the same result.

I couldn't protect my hyung and the Clan Lord I believed in, the one that I followed and loved, died right in front of me. My regret was palpable. I didn't want to follow the same road twice. I had returned to the past to change the outcome. I wanted to change.

Analysing the battle, I calculated for the most optimum action. Estimating the exact amount of mana required and formulating an efficient plan. No longer did I plan to hide myself. If necessary, I acted. Could be troubling if I was discovered but the solution was simple. Don't get caught. I was confident with my skills to get away with it.

Not even a second later I finished my analysis, establishing An-sol's status and location. My very first task was to aggro the Boss monster. The monster's bulk hid me from the prying eyes of my party. I raised my mana and prepared a magic bolt that could pierce the monster's skin. No longer needing to pretend my aiming, I fired off the bolt immediately.

Ping! Ping! Ping!

Feeling my killing intent, the monster startled and turned its head to look back. However, the bolts flew off with a speed that was on a whole different level and pierced the Boss monster's chest. But there was still one more thing.

Pung! Pung! Pung!

The bolts swirling with mana destroyed its skin and bit into its flesh with an explosive sound. The effect was immediate.

GRAAAAAAAAH!

Is it painful? It should be. I ran swiftly as the Boss monster began to shriek in pain. Utilising my Third Eye, I saw the party except for An-sol running and stumbling along. They hadn't realised yet that An-sol had lagged behind. Still within expectation, rather this was better for me...

Wait. An-hyun just stopped.

“Sol! Sol! Answer me!”

An-hyun had just noticed An-sol wasn't with them and was calling for her anxiously. That dumb idiot. I increased my speed and the distance between the monster and I decreased in a flash. Having seen my running toward it, the Boss monster raised its large hand sky high, its entire being trembling in rage.

I had reduced the intensity of the attack to keep it alive and that damn ingrate doesn't know the mercy I bestowed as the monster slammed its hand toward me. The hand came at me sharply and quickly. Anyone who was watching would be quaking in their boots but to me, it was moving at a painfully slow pace.

Keeping my fast pace, I kicked the ground for an extra push. I bent my knees and tried to keep my upper body parallel to the ground. Immediately large fingers brushed past my face but only a few strands of my hair flew by. I had completely avoided the Boss monster's attack and managed to get within. A perfectly clean slide. I soon saw An-sol clutching the ground with both her hand as she coughed loudly.

“Cough! Cough!”

This dense cloud of dust must have lifted when the Boss monster landed from its jump. I would have usually moved into comfort and reassure An-sol but this wasn't the time or the place. Moving next to her quickly, I picked her up in a princess carry. She was startled by my presence and asked shakily.

“Su... Su-hyun Oppa...?”

“Shush. Let’s get away from this bastard first.”

Firing off the bolts I had loaded while running, I didn’t wait to see the results as I jumped head first into the dust cloud. Hearing the Boss monster giving out another painful shriek, I must have hit the mark.

An-sol expression was something to see. Her eyes were filled with tears as she stared at me like I was her Messiah. Looking ahead, I saw Yu-jung and Han-byeol were trying their best to dissuade An-hyun from turning back around. But when An-hyun saw me coming out of the dust cloud, his jaws fell wide open in disbelief.

To see An-hyun’s expression change in such myriad of emotion was a funny thing to watch. First, that look of stupefaction, then relief which soon turned to one that was on the verge of tears. Any rate now the siblings could start a crying party. I kept on running, cursing the sheer stupidity of it all.

At that moment, I saw Han-byeol shouting desperately and I felt something cold brush my back. That bastard had no plans to send us off easy, as it was using its tail as a whip to catch my back. I could survive getting hit by that writhing tail but An-sol won’t be able to handle it.

I was filled with the desire to kill this thing as no one in Hall Plain had done it yet. Killing the Boss monster would be quite an

achievement and there might be some kind of reward for defeating it. Another reason was the desire to Solo a Boss monster. For such an outcome I needed to separate myself with the party and so I decided to take the hit from the monster.

My back was soon smashed by the monster's tail. With a thud, the force pushed through my back. While it wasn't painful I felt like I was going to be catapulted off the ground due to the force. 'Felt like it' because the force wasn't going anywhere.

Rousing my mana, I counteracted and fought against force within my body. The basic principle was using a small amount of force to control a greater power. Through this principle, I could control or divide the force exerting on my body. This technique was mostly used to diminish the force I couldn't control by spreading it out throughout my body but in other times I had used it like I did now.

Controlling the force within a tolerable level that An-sol could withstand, I let the residual force lift us off the ground. I shifted the residual force to my left and before we separated I whispered into An-sol's ear.

"Get up as fast as you can and head straight for the Warp Gate."

Our bodies were violently thrown apart. I was thrown to the left while An-sol flew in the direction of the party. I am not sure if it was An-sol's Luck points acting up again but she landed straight into An-hyun's embrace.

I scrambled to get up as soon as I landed. There was something

fundamentally different about the Boss and the monsters that appeared in the Rite of Passage. The Boss monster had recognised the danger I was and leapt for me without dropping its guard. The Boss monster's whole body exuded killing intent. I seemed to have successfully aggroed it.

THUD!

With the explosive sound, the earth shook heavily. My body shook violently but I had avoided its attack. That made the monster angrier as it began trying to squash me with its feet.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

“OPPPAAAA!”

“HYYUUUUNNG!”

WWHHHHAAAAT! Well, that was how I wanted to respond but I wanted to keep the image of that cool and silent Oppa so I kept my mouth shut. I would have usually waved my hand and said I was okay but this wasn't the time. I signalled them to keep running but the party wouldn't budge. I shouted at the top of my voice.

“Fly, you fools! Run to the Warp Gaaattttee!”

There was some commotion as I saw An-hyun running while forcefully dragging along a defiant Han-byeol. Man, that guy. He ran back for An-sol without hesitation and now he's running for

the Warp Gate without hesitation. When I was about to click my tongue in disapproval, I had to quickly jump to the left. This bastard was still at it with its feet.

My temper was rising as I dodged attacks from this worthless piece of shit. But I kept my cool because once the kids were gone, this thing was going to experience a serious beat down. With the constant thumping of the monster's foot, dust covered the whole area.

Wanting a clear view clouded by the dust, I used my mana to erased traces of myself and slipped behind the monster. I disappeared from the Boss monster's senses. Having no eyes, the monster became frantic as it searched for me. I stared impassively for a moment before I turned my head towards the party.

Fortunately enough, An-hyun seems to have succeeded dragging Han-byeol along as all four of them had reached the Warp Gate. An-hyun's hair was dishevelled, probably Han-byeol's doing. To be honest, it was rather hilarious.

The Warp Gate came alive, with blue mana tremoring as a translucent barrier surrounded them. Their transfer to the Summon Room was starting. I breathed a sigh of relief as faint blue light gently surrounded them. One major part was finished.

The only thing left...

I quickly threw myself on the ground as I saw the dust cloud had clear slightly. I wanted to avoid any argument of why I hadn't run

for the Warp Gate. With Han-byeol's cold deduction I wanted to use the Boss monster's tail as an excuse.

The dust cloud had completely settled. The intensity of the blue light surrounding the party had increased. Starting from their feet, they were slowly being erased. Still flat on the ground, I raised my hand toward them. There wasn't any meaning behind it other than signalling them I would see them later.

But... An-hyun wiped his eyes with his hands. Yu-jung had flopped to the ground (it was amazing to see someone sitting down without their feet) crying. Han-byeol had covered her face with her hands, her shoulders shaking while An-sol was waving her hand, shedding tears in my direction.

Wh, What? I never meant to make them cry...

## Chapter 33 - Boss Monster (3/4)

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Kim Han-byeol did not look away until the end. I could see in her eyes, urging me to get up and get away but I had no such plans. Although the party had all somehow utterly misunderstood me.

The party soon completely disappeared after the Warp Gate pulsated with blue light. Everyone had managed to safely transfer out.

Had they left?

They left right?

Yup, they are gone.

Darkness began to fill out my surroundings. The Boss monster hardly cared at losing most of its prey as it growled and focused its attention on me. Using both my hands, I slowly pushed myself up. My body felt stiff all over as it has been quite a while since I've been tossed around like this. Standing up, I stretched my back and heard my joints twist and turn making that satisfying crackling sound.

I stared bemusedly at my excellent crossbow and let it drop. I had no use for it any longer. Clattering on the ground, the crossbow kicked up dust as it bounced on the ground. I stepped on it without hesitation.

Crack!

I stared indifferently at the broken crossbow, all the while as I stretched out my hand at the spot the party dropped their gears. Raising my hand, I invoked my mana and cast telekinesis. An-hyun's sword spun in the air as it flew into my hand.

Finally, a sword in my hands.

One of the unaccustomed feelings that dogged me through the Rite of Passage was that I was lacking a sword. In Hall Plain, the sword was my life. I always had a sword with me when I slept, when I ate and even when I was bathing. When I had given the sword to An-hyun, it was like losing a dear old friend.

This was almost over, I would soon be able to return to Hall Plain. How I longed for this moment. How I had yearned to return to that place. The dream had finally turned into reality when I grasped the Zero Code within my hand. That reality was just one step away and my heart heaved in anticipation.

My fervent emotions had awakened Hwajung that had settled within my heart. I felt like lava was flowing instead of my blood and my heart was pounding. My breath that had stopped, the heart that was long dead was renewed in a roaring fire. This was the opening act to a long battle.

GRAAAAR!

The Boss monster howled its battle cry. I silently gazed at the sword in my hand. I had acquired abilities that could enable me to surpass my past self but there was no guarantee that I was the strongest. But I had no fear. Though I may fall into the abyss once again, I vowed to never give up. Calm, I raised my sword toward the Boss monster.

I held my sword with new resolve and the air exploded out around me.

Blade Master (Rank: Extra) has been activated.

The moment a blade is held, a corrective action is asserted onto every swing. Through years of experience and hard work, a multitude of achievement and class selection, the Ability has been adjusted upward by 2 Ranks.

Close Combat (Rank: A Plus) has been activated.

An Ability that surpassed the extreme of what people can do with a melee weapon. In close combat, it is impossible to be pushed back. Due to years of experience and hard work, with the current Class selection, the Ability has been adjusted upward by 1 Ranks.

I had changed my Class from Sword Master to Sword Specialist when I had returned to the past. I had Abilities related to the sword and a Class related to the sword. The difference of power with and without a sword was like heaven and earth. If my killing intent before was like a floating vapour, it was now a definite aura of <I will kill you>. This intent surrounded me and buffeted all around me like a wild storm.

In my eyes, this thing was so insignificant that it wasn't even worth crushing it like a bug. Taking a step forward, the Boss monster took a step back. Well, it couldn't be helped.

No matter how smart the monster was, it still possessed that animalistic instinct. The monster had already lost the will to fight, realising how far apart our level was.

My swordsmanship had its origins in Tai-Chi. Instead of using overwhelming power, the technique used the opponent's own strength against him. This was the only way for me to overcome my lack of muscle strength compared to the other top-rated Players. To explain in more detail, it's principal was based on Electrotherapy (targeting the soft spots) and Iyugeukkang (overcoming hardness with softness) to suppress the target through tranquil movement.

I slowly drew back my sword. I was going to strike before the monster's brain could even register an attack. My posture was set as if I was about to unsheathe my sword. This made me look unprepared and defenceless.

This technique made it impossible for the opponent to predict

the first line of attack. With a lightning speed attack, the opponent would be hit before it could even anticipate an attack or, in most cases, allowed me to take the initiative.

I prepared myself, aiming at the monster shivering before my eyes.

Soon.

My sword cut through the air without hesitation.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Begin debrief. That was a marvellous sword skill, Player Kim Su-hyun. Congratulations on surviving the Rite of Passage. After six days, sixteen hours, forty-two minutes and twenty-seven seconds you have earned the right to enter Hall Plain.”

With but a swing, the Boss monster was cut in half. When I returned to the Room of Summoning, those were the first things Seraph spoke when she saw me. She was still sitting lightly on top of that small altar, staring at me calmly as her wings waved gently by. Not even a week had passed since I last saw her but it had felt like an eternity.

I nodded stiffly and sat on the floor.

“What about the others?”

This was a bottomless pit of questions but the Rite of Passage was fundamentally different from Hall Plain. The Rite of Passage had no limitation on Player monitoring. This was clearly evident by Seraph's comment about my play and I was certain she was tracking other such Players similar to myself.

"You do not have permission to access information on other Players."

"I'm not asking about your three sizes, I just want you to tell if others are okay. Man, you are so touchy about this things."

Seraph sighed deeply at my response and replied composedly.

"The Players An-hyun, An-sol, Lee Yu-jung and Kim Han-byeol have all been transferred within procedure to their Room of Summoning. They are all awaiting entrance to Hall Plain with their respective Angels."

"I see. I presume they are learning about Hall Plain with the remaining time?"

"Knowledge of Hall Plain will not take that long to impart. Rather, the Players are been shown Classes and Abilities that are suitable for their characteristics. Player Kim Su-hyun, please do not regard yourself in a similar light to the other Players."

I kept silence as I heard her explanation. In the past, I had

managed to survive for seven days and was able to return to the Room of Summoning. When I arrived, I was taught the basics about Hall Plain and was able to select basic Player settings. Back then, it felt like I spent half a day.

“All the Players are transferred to Hall Plain simultaneously. Therefore, there is a need to wait for all the Players to qualify within the seven day period.”

“Then just send me on ahead...”

“That is not permissible.”

This wasn't what I was hoping to hear. I had finished the Boss monster in record time so that I could enter Hall Plain as fast as possible. I had asked just in case but Seraph had cut me off before I could complete my request. I grumbled petulantly at Seraph.

“That means I have to stay here for a day and a half. Are you telling me I have to wait for that long? What should I do? Clap and play games with you?”

Despite my petulant manner, Seraph replied clearly.

“If you so desire it, I shall. But for those who passed the Rite of Passage early, a more detailed explanation of Hall Plain is provided.”

“Don't want to hear it.”

“Then shall we clap hands and play games?”

“Ho... No. Let's just chat.”

I shook my head at Seraph's earnest reply. There was no joking with this Angel. Since I had the time, I decided to ask her about some points that were bugging me about the Rite of Passage. Of course, I was going to be sarcastic. Seraph tilted her head thinking and then nodded her head.

“I felt this during the Rite of Passage but did you guys actually think about balance?”

“Yes.”

A short answer from Seraph.

“... Let's ignore the fact about being dropped in the middle of the forest and those Wraiths. But what the devil was up with that Boss monster by the Warp Gate? What kind of Rite of Passage does that? Prospective Players won't be able to pass through at this rate.”

“Is there a problem?”

“If I wasn't there, our party would have been wiped out. I just can't understand the reasoning behind summoning a monster like that.”

Seraph replied without hesitation.

“The Rite of Passage is automatically balanced by the standard of Players summoned each time. Of course, during this run, we took particular care to exclude Player Kim Su-hyun. However, the number of exceptional Players that participated this time could be counted on five different hands.”

“That still doesn’t justify such powerful Boss monster. How do you expect Players who don’t even know how to use magic to beat such monster?”

“Beating it is impossible, a different approach is expected. The Boss monster is summoned randomly around two hundred and three hundred meters from the Warp Gate. Facing the monster alone is impossible. When there is a minimum of five people, it is expected that one in five will manage to reach the Warp Gate.”

Hearing Seraph’s explanation, I caught on immediately what she implied.

“... Then you are saying that four people are bait.”

“Correct.”

I became speechless. But I understood the reasoning behind the Boss monster set up around the Warp Gate. The Player who survived needed to experience the sadness of losing their

comrades. Such loss was common in Hall Plain and it might be better from them to experience the shock of loss now than later.

This left a bad taste in my mouth but I had nothing to say. I had turned back time because I couldn't overcome the sense of loss. Letting out a loud sigh, I was about to change the topic when Seraph interjected first.

“I admit that there was some level of difficulty. For this, the four who had arrived first will be given a small amount of Gold Points as a reward.”

“... Oh? That means that our group arrive before anyone else. What about me?”

“Player Kim Su-hyun had arrived fifth. The aforementioned four people had arrived first concurrently. To each of these people, 2500 Gold Points are planned to be allocated as a reward.”

Oho. That's good news. 2500 Gold Points is really helpful in the beginning. The Player exclusive shops that only accepted these Gold Points was extremely useful. My eyes sparkled.

“Gold points. Give me.”

“Unfortunately, it is only given to the first arrival. Originally, it was intended for one person to be award ten thousand Gold Points. Coincidentally, with four people having arrived first, the reward was divided into four portions. Player Kim Su-hyun is not

applicable.”

Was it? I nodded regretfully. There was no need to worry about money if I exchanged 2500 Gold Points to Hall Plain Gold. Or rather, I could even acquire some beginner equipment. Seeing my despondent expression, Seraph looked at me uncomprehendingly.

“Player Kim Su-hyun. You seem quite remorseful. The reward is no more than 2500 points.”

“Gold Points don’t grow on trees you know.”

“That is correct. However, Player Kim Su-hyun currently possesses exactly 3 784 720 Gold Points. I do not believe you need to dwell on 2500 Points.”

“... What?”

## Chapter 34 - Boss Monster (4/4)

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I had over 3 million Gold Points?

For a moment, I was overwhelmed by what she said. But then I remembered something Seraph mentioned just before I came back to the past.

<Please do not misinterpret what I am about to say. I spoke before, Player Kim Su-Hyun, you are currently in possession of considerable GP. To let it disappear like this is not a rational action.>

Did I had that much Gold Points left after my Privileges? I wondered if it was possible to have this much Points remaining but it kind of made sense to me. Even though I had accomplished numerous deeds, I had stopped caring about Gold Points in the later half of my life in Hall Plain. I do have a hazy memory of receiving an unimaginable amount of Gold Points when I got my hands on the Zero Code. I guess hindsight is twenty/twenty.

"Good. Then call up the Player store list for me."

"Yes. Understood. However, there is still an outstanding reward.

"

"This again?"

Seraph nodded her head at my question

“This pertains the Boss monster you have defeated. I shall transfer the reward at once. Please check the message box for more details.”

Hearing this, I lightly flicked my finger. Suddenly, message after messages began to pop up in front of me.

### An Outstanding Achievement!

You have defeated the Boss Monster - An apex predator that had kill numerous potential Players in the Rite of Passage. An achievement will be added to the count.

You have received 2 Free Attribute Points.

You have received fifty-thousand Gold Points. Gold Points can be used within the Room of Summoning or in large cities with Player exclusive shops.

Whoa.

Getting an Achievement and fifty-thousand Gold Points was great but receiving Free Attributes Points was quite unexpected and pleasant surprise. A Player could receive these as a reward for completing the first stage mission, which was to graduate from the Player Academy. But that would take three months and the Player

only received four points.

There were other methods besides the Academy but they were few and far between. Also the time it took to completely one was insane. In the past, I had twenty-one Achievements but from all that, I was given a partly one free Attribute Point. Knowing this, I became ecstatic.

Seraph still looked on with that casual, nonchalant expressing as she pulled up the Player store listing.

[Player Store]

\* Items can only be purchased through Player's own Gold Points.

[Player Kim Su-hyun's Gold Points: 3,834,720 GP]

- \* 1. Weapons(▽)
- \* 2. Armors(▽)
- \* 3. Accessory(▽)
- \* 4. Other Equipment(▽)
- \* 5. Potions(▽)
- \* 6. Elixirs(▽)
- \* 7. Spells(▽)
- \* 8. Materials(▽)

\* 9. Wish(Need GP: 1,000,000)

\* 10. Miscellaneous(▽)

Shifting through the lists, I couldn't see the items I was looking for. But then I had a eureka moment.

"I am going to donate 77,777 Gold Points to the store. So hurry up and show me the hidden items."

There was a rumour about a Player that had used 77,777 GP by chance and discovered this secret. This 77,777 GP was a secret Easter Egg that allowed the Player to see the hidden items within the Player store only once. The funny thing was that this Player was so broke he couldn't purchase anything.

"... How did you know this as well?"

"The Boss Monster told me while it was begging for its life."

"Processing this is certainly not a problem but please stop with your falsity. Also please refrain from doing anything strange like the Hwajung."

I nodded all the while smirking at her comment. Seraph just scowled lightly with her usual grace, unwilling to take my answer at face value.

“... Confirmed, 77,777 GP has been received. For one time only, all hidden items will be revealed. Player Kim Su-hyun has 3,756,943 GP remaining.”

Seraph indicated as she lightly waved her hand but I could see her slightly cringing as she spoke. The list renewed itself and was updated. I didn't even bother with all the options on the list, I went straight to the Elixir tab as there might be something that could increase my vitality.

The Potions tab began to spread out and increase in size. I slowly began to scroll through it.

Oh, there was something like this? Having an elixir or two would come in handy... but it was three hundred thousand GP each. Hmm, an elixir that can increase Special and Latent Ability by one rank... Not bad at all at five hundred thousand GP each. Quite affordable.

Other Players would probably gasp at this extravagant prices but I bought them without a second thought. Spending GP was more beneficial than saving it up and with chances like these happened rarely, I decided to spend as much GP as possible. But, there was one thing I absolutely refused to consider and that was buying a wish. Wishes were in direct violations with my principal and other than using it to save another Player, it was useless to me.

“Wha, an elixir that increases Attribute points by six and it's only nine hundred thousand points. Seraph, this, I want three of them.”

“That is impossible. Items purchased from the hidden list disappears immediately after purchase. Except for potions, it is impossible to buy more than two of the same item.”

This meant no-one else would be able to purchase these elixirs after me. Slightly regretful I decided to concede for the other Players. After carefully going through the store list from 1 to 10, I decided to purchase the following items:

- \* Angel Tears (x1) : Generates six new Attribute Points. The points can be added to any Attribute the Player desires. (900,000 GP)

- \* Elixirs (x2) : Cures any status. Recovers all mana and vitality. Can bring back a person from death's door.

- \* Vision Elixir (x1) - increases Skill: This elixir can increase Special : Latent Ability by one rank. However, this does not apply to Unique Abilities. (700,000 GP)

- \* Vitality Boosting Elixir (x1) : Increase Vitality by 2 Points. Cannot increase other Attributes. (200,000 GP)

- \* Nil-Sword (x1) : An invisible sword that has been passed down since time immemorial. The sword confers an ability to the Player. The sword is invisible to the naked eye as it is made from a substance that exists in the spirit world. Therefore the sword's attack can pierce enemies in different dimensions and if the Player can satisfy a set condition, the Player can summon a Sword God into the world. The sword possesses an impressive sharpness and

boasts an excellent durability, with an ability to restore itself in the case of damage. Another of Nil-Sword's properties allows it to consume 100% of Magic Attacks and create a Magical Defense. (1,200,000 GP)

\* Exchange GP for Hall Plain Gold (10 GP = 1 Gold) : 10000 GP → 1000 Gold

Total purchase amounts to 3,610,000 GP. There is no refund. Would you like to purchase?

“Yes.”

Purchase complete. Player Kim Su-hyun has 146,943 GP remaining. Items have been transferred to the Player's storage. Player can access their storage in any settlements.

Whew. After ending a joyful shopping session, I lifted up my head and saw that Seraph was palming her lovely face with her hands. This was the first time I saw Seraph being so frustrated. Naturally, I took advantage of it.

“Seraph. Are you hurt? Why are you crying?”

“... Player Kim Su-hyun”

“Yeah?”

“To spend so much at once... I can understand a few things but... and that Nil-Sword... And...”

Letting out a deep sigh, Seraph looked at me strangely. I bought this much as I was certainly not going to get this opportunity again. The GP? I could simply save it up again. I spent the GP I earned the way I wanted to so I couldn't fathom why Seraph was giving me such a look.

Catching her staring at me, Seraph hastily fixed her expression.

“The Nil-Sword... on the surface, its design is quite plain. There are numerous other swords with good abilities and splendid design. I would like to hear the reason why you have selected this particular sword.”

“Only fools focus on the appearance of their swords. Also, while it's a shame that it doesn't have particularly good perks, the fact that the sword is invisible gives me a huge advantage at the start of the battle. This sword also provides 100% defence against Magic attacks and reuse that mana as Magic Shield. If I use Hwajung in conjunction with the sword, there would be no equal. The sword is also durable and recovers itself... What? You worried now?”

Seraph let out a solitary laughter at my jab.

“To be honest, I do feel a little worried. Player Kim Su-hyun is strong. With all the items you have obtained using the Gold Points you can be considered stronger than the other top Players who had

entered before you... However, monitoring is forbidden. Perhaps you might know this already but in Hall Plain, the Players have a strong tendency to keep and protect their vested interests. There are also small groups that resort to using extreme measure. In there, it is impossible to accomplish things alone.”

Her last couple of words poked my heart sharply. I unconsciously chewed on my lips before replying.

“I understand what you are saying. The protruding awl is a target. You don’t have to worry.”

“I am relieved that you know this.”

I looked at Seraph nonchalantly.

“By the way, how much time is left?”

“Two hours has passed since you have cleared the Rite of Passage. If you would like, I can provide an overall explanation of Hall Plain.”

“... Don’t want to hear it.”

With the remaining time, I decide to meditate. Meditation was primarily a training tool in which one lost track of time while contemplating one’s inner being. I sat cross-legged and was about to sink into my inner being when I heard Seraph’s alluring voice.

“Player Kim Su-hyun.”

“What?”

“There is one thing I would like to ask.”

“Spit it out.”

No matter how harsh I spoke, Seraph still looked at me calmly.

“Player Kim Su-hyun, do you hate me?”

What dribbles is she on about now? Opening my eyes, I gave Seraph an unpleasant look. I couldn't grasp the meaning behind this sudden rhetoric. Having realised this Seraph amended.

“Player Kim Su-hyun, I am your Assistant and guide.”

“To me, you are an annoying Angel that meddles in everything.”

“In the Rite of Passage, I saw a man who was patient and reliable to his fellow companions. Is that Player Kim Su-hyun's real persona? Or is the person whom I am speaking with the real persona?”

I looked at her with scrutiny. To put it bluntly, the me right now

was closer to my real self. The Rite of Passage allowed me to practice and build my persona. With her amendment, I understood what she was trying to ask.

“... Humans are creatures with thousand different faces”

Seraph eyes became wide as I answered her gently rather than snapping at her again.

“I would like to request a more detailed explanation.”

“It means you act differently depending on the person. I act nice to those who like me and do you think I need to act friendly to those who hate me?”

Seraph nodded briefly at my answer.

“The line between the two seems to be clearly drawn. Based on your explanation, I do not hate Player Kim Su-hyun. However, you have yet to look at me in a friendly manner.”

“Don’t distinguish between the two so easily. Human sometimes hopes for those who hate them to like them. That means the exact opposite also exist.”

If there is one thing I like about Seraph, conversation flowed directly and to the point. She didn’t misinterpret but accepted things as I said them and analysed them rationally. Seraph nodded once more and answered.

“I understand. I feel as if I received good guidance today.”

“I really have no idea what you hoped to gain from someone you forcefully kidnapped and using as a guinea pig. Unbelievable. Anyway, don’t talk to me anymore.”

Seraph looked like she wanted to continue the conversation but she kept her mouth shut. Clearing my mind, I immediately started my meditation.

## Chapter 35 - To Hall Plain! (1/4)

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Hall Plain was divided into four different continents. The East, West, North and Southern continents were established areas which are under the control of various Players and Residents (Existing citizens of Hall Plain). Yet, compared to these established regions, there was still a vast tract of lands that was left unexplored. Only a day's travel away from the established zones laid unknown dangers.

To deal with the anxiety of travelling through the unknown dangers, expeditions were sent to explore and occupy the wilderness. These expeditions created safe passageways to travel between continents and towns but fears persisted as the wilderness blanketed the whole regions.

Ah-hyun and the rest of the party were assigned to the Northern continent as the starting point. Players who earned their qualifications in the Rite of Passage were first summoned to the <Starting Inn> found in the largest city of each continent. With a total of 5 <Starting Inns>, this meant that there were five different Rite of Passages that happened simultaneously.

By Angel's decisions, An-hyun and the party were the first to arrived in Hall Plain. They woke up from the Inn and went down to the first floor as they were instructed. Seeing the chairs and tables littered around the place, they sat down and waited for other Players to emerge.

There wasn't anything special about the inn, this was a place built just for people to rest and to wait for others. There were a

door and windows on the far side, looking outside through the windows, An-hyun decided against leaving the Inn. There was nothing out there except for pure blue barrier that completely surrounded the Inn. This made the Inn feel separated from the outside world.

The inn was silent as other Players had yet to arrive. An-hyun paced around the windows before cautiously sitting on one of the empty chairs. There were familiar faces around him. An-sol, Lee Yu-jung and Kim Han-byeol... Not a word was shared between them. Rather, they couldn't.

Stealing a glance at his sister, An-Hyun saw that she was shaking and her teeth were chattering insatiably. An-hyun knew exactly what she was going through, the remorse of survivor's guilt. He himself was filled with it and tremor rumbled through his body. The source of this deep apprehension was that Kim Su-hyun was dead. The support they desperately needed disappearing.

An-hyun's mind was filled with memories of Su-hyun. That Hyung was patient and calm. Whenever Hyung spoke with his silent countenance, An-hyun felt his confidence rising. Not even a week had passed since they had met, but Hyung had left a deep impression on them all.

<Fly, you fools! Run to the Warp Gate!>

Hyung, who had send them off with a wave and a smile, all the while he was crumbled on the ground. Laid low by that monster's tail. An-hyun realised he was nothing. All this time, it was Hyung's reassuring presence that allowed him to step forward. He had

unconsciously leant too much on the support Hyung provided.

An-hyun couldn't bear to look at Yu-jung and Han-byeol, knowing that Hyung had sacrificed his life to save his sister. But he gathered his courage and lifted his head, he wanted to see how they were.

Yu-jung had flopped on the table. She had buried her head in her arms the moment she came down and hadn't moved since. He could see her trembling occasionally, trying to hide showing her weakness from the others.

An-sol was still the same. Though she wasn't weeping bitterly, tears leaked from her eyes and dripped to the floor. There were still many unshed tears left in her eyes. Even the Angel had gently consoled An-sol while setting up the basic settings. Only Han-byeol managed to maintain her cold expression. An-hyun couldn't fathom what she was thinking but he felt a cold aura encircling the surrounding.

No one opened their lips and the silence reigned in the quiet Inn. Only faint weeping was intermittently heard. Time passed and raucous could be heard inside the Inn. The sound of multiple people speaking leaked out from the second floor. The party could hear unfamiliar voices when the door of the second floor opened. From this, An-hyun recognises that it must be others that survived the Rite of Passage. But a silent idea betrayed his line of thought.

‘That could be Hyung. He could have escaped. Then...’

An-hyun quickly leapt up from his seat. At the sudden noise, everyone focused their eyes on An-hyun. Even Yu-jung lifted her eyes and looked at him with her swollen eyes. An-hyun began to speak excitedly.

“Hyung, that could be Hyung.”

“... What are you talking about?” Yu-jung retorted in a hoarse voice.

An-hyun quickly pointed toward the stairs leading to the second floor. “We can’t be the only people that survived. There’s definitely other survivors that were transferred back. Hyung might be one of them...”

Hearing An-hyun’s explanation, Yu-jung quickly rose herself and ran toward the stairs. An-sol chased after her, having come to the same conclusion. Only Han-byeol looked on apathetically, unwilling to believe in a fool's hope.

Humans were such pitiful animals. Inclined to self-justification over and over. They had all seen Kim Su-hyun collapsed before the monster. They had all shed tears at his final goodbye. But they all had hope, that maybe, just maybe...

“If it’s Hyung, he can do it. Right? He must have escaped.”

“Ye... yeah. Oppa isn’t a person who would go quietly. He will slam open that door like he did in the City and climb down stairs.

Yup. Exactly like that.”

With a shaky voice, An-hyun and Yu-jung looked toward each other, trying to convince themselves. Before they could rush up to the second floor, they heard the door opening. Like magic, they stop in their tracks and turn their site upwards. Their hearts thumping madly.

The door soon opened and the person was... regrettably not Kim Su-hyun. They were merely people that the party had met before. A total of four people were coming down the stairs and the person leading them looked at An-hyun with recognition.

“Oh. You guys are here already. Good to see that you are all alive.”

“Huh? Wu Jung-min. Who the hell is... Ah~ It’s those kids from back then. So they all survived? Didn’t they say they were going to the Warp Gate?”

“... Chun Seun-Hyun. Shut up.”

The three guys chatted amongst themselves as they came down to the first floor. The woman who had lost her sister, Won Hye-Su, followed behind them silently looking depressed.

But An-hyun and the rest had no desire to pay attention to such matters. For An-hyun, the identities of people coming down the stairs was a matter of life and death. The moment he saw Wu

Jung-min, he was overcome with disappointment. A strange mood permeated the air. Noticing this, Seon Yu-un led Won Hye-Su to one of the tables and sat down. Only Chun Seun-Hyun was grumbling about in discontent.

“Feh! There is no need to look gloomy because of us. We are all in the same boat you know. Okay, okay. I am sorry for throwing that dagger.”

“... Uh.”

“Ah. Okay. I am really sorry. I’ve changed a lot since then.”

“... It doesn’t matter.”

“Re, really? I see... That’s good then. Haha... ha...”

Yu-jung’s reply turned Chun Seun-Hyun more fretful. He was puzzled as she seemed out of character. Even Wu Jung-min caught on and began to calmly scan the surrounding.

“Come to think of it, you are one person short. Where is the young man with the crossbow?”

Only silence met Wu Jung-min’s question and he immediately connected the dots, imagining what could have happened. There was only one reason that guy wasn’t here, it meant he died in the Rite of Passage.

“Perhaps... did it get him? I told him not to go to the Warp Gate but looks like he was too stubborn to listen. Then how did all of you survive...”

“He’s not dead!”

“He’s still alive!”

Yu-jung and An-sol shrieked their denial. The atmosphere turned awkward for a moment, but Wu Jung-min pushed on and turned to An-hyun.

“Did you perhaps meet that monster? The alien looking one.”

An-hyun nodded weakly and turned away, unwilling to answer any more questions. Understanding what An-hyun was going through, Wu Jung-min made a bitter smile as he moved silently toward where Seon Yu-un and Won Hye-Su was sitting. Chun Seun-Hyun followed suit, sitting in the closest chair and stretched his legs

“Uuuaaaaa. Finally, I feel alive sitting on a chair rather than cold stone. So those guys met that monster as well?”

“Seun-Hyun. Don’t talk so loudly. It’s the same for them like when we lost Jin-Tae.”

“Then he’s 100% certainly dead. Unlucky. I was going to get him back once I saw him again. By the way, Hye-su...”

Chun Seun-hyun stopped in the middle of his speech, seeing the glare Seon Yu-un was sending him. Won Hye-Su heard her name being called. Lifting her head for a moment, she spoke with a weary voice.

“It doesn’t matter to me whether he’s dead or not. Though it is regrettable. I wished he would go through the pain I went suffered. Looks like he became the cause of the pain rather.”

Hearing such thoughtless words, Lee Yu-jung was about to explode. Jung-min sent Won Hye-Su a cold look and cut her off in a heavy voice.

“Stop talking to others so carelessly.”

“I said this doesn’t matter to me at all. What’s there to argue about?”

“Then why did you said that young man should go through the same pain you went suffered? We lost Jin-tae and your sister. You know how it feels to lose someone precious and you think it’s alright to bitch about it like this?”

“That’s...”

When Won Hye-su hesitated, Jung-min snorted and continued.

“If you have nothing good to say, keep your mouth shut. Again, that young man had nothing to do with Hye-yun’s death.”

“Jung-min. Hye-su. Just stop it.”

Those two continued to glare at each other. Hye-su was fuming in her anger. Seon Yu-un interjects before it could become worse. However, the two continued to stare daggers into each other’s eyes.

Except for Yu-jung, An-hyun and the party didn’t care at all what was happening next to them. Their eyes were still focused on the staircase. The second floor became more and more noisy, signalling more survivors being transported there.

The sound of joy, of despair and numerous others could be heard. The survivors grouped themselves and began to descend the staircase. The door opened once more and the two latest figures revealed themselves. They were another set of familiar faces.

Park Don-gul.

\*\*\*\*\*

His felt refreshed from the pleasurable feeling of having mana spread throughout his body. The effect seemed amplified by the fact that Hwajung had unclogged the minute points from his fingertips to the toe. From detailed inspection of his body, he could

see that both the quantity and the quality of mana had increased. That wasn't all.

Wastes were burned away and blood vessels were opened, making the whole body more receptive to mana. This meant that if I faced a Player with same attributes and sword, I would be superior.

Still, I had a long way to go before I could fully use Hwajung. That 70 Vitality point was just too much of a stumbling block. Seraph stated that to use Hwajung, I required a minimum of 90 Vitality points and to use Hwajung to its maximum potential, I needed a minimum of 101 Vitality. (I was astounded when I heard this. The difference between 99 and 100 points was like heaven and earth. Between 100 and 101 the difference was a whole world apart.)

Trying to use the full power right now with only 70 points would result in my body breaking down. Counting the maximum amount of points I could earn in the beginning, I found I could earn a total of 14 points.

2 points from the Boss monster, 2 points from the Vitality-Boosting Elixir, 6 points from the Angel Tears and 4 points for completing the Beginner Academy. I knew I should put all the points I earned and was about to earn into Vitality, but there was one corner of my heart that was filled with greed.

In Hall Plain, someone with an average Attributes of around 60 could pull their own weight. For that reason, as the person increased their Attribute to 70, 80 and 90 their value increased

correspondingly. Once an Attribute went over 90 points, it became progressively difficult that even 1 point increase became precious.

That's why my greed flared up. I called up my Attributes.

[Strength 94] [Resistance 92] [Agility 98] [Vitality 70] [Magic Power 96] [Luck 88]

Excluding the points from the Vitality Booster Elixir, I had 12 points that I could use.

If I increased Strength by 4 points, Agility by 3 points, Magic Power by 5 points, then I had two attributes over 101 points with strength at 98 points. If Seraph could read my mind right now, she would be frothing at the mouth.

Vitality was the foundation for all the other Attributes. A weak foundation would cause a bottleneck, no matter how high the Attribute point was. I knew I shouldn't but there was that nagging thought kept egging me on.

For now, I decided to wipe my thoughts clean. I decided that I was going to train my vitality like crazy in the Beginner Academy for three months. There was a high chance that Vitality wouldn't even increase but I was grasping straws at this point. As more Vitality I increased, the more points I had for other Attributes.

After calling back the mana from my whole body and storing it, I opened my eyes. I didn't know how much time had passed but I

was sure it was more than a day. Looking around, I saw that the portal to Hall Plain was already opened. Feeling dumbfound, I called out to Seraph who was still silently watching me.

“... Did the transfer start already?”

“Yes. Transfer of most of the Players has been complete, only Player Kim Su-hyun is remaining.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“Rather than meditation... it seems you were deep in thought. I did not want to act rashly. You have no need to worry as there is still time left.”

The guys must be worried. This grated me as I wanted to enter early and clear up any misunderstandings. Shaking off the dust, I stood up and walked toward the portal to Hall Plain.

I did not say any goodbye to Seraph. There was no need, as we had to see more of each other in the future. However, Seraph seems to have a different idea as she grasped me by the collar before I could enter the portal.

“Player Kim Su-hyun.”

“What?”

I didn't turn around. I already had one foot inside the portal.

“Please be safe. If there is a need to call you, I shall send a message to the temple.”

I shrugged casually and threw myself into the blue light.

## Chapter 36 - To Hall Plain! (2/4)

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There was nothing special about the transfer. Having experienced it over a hundred times, it was a so-so feeling. I was transferred to the <Starting Inn> and came out of the second floor hallway. Arriving here, I heard a large commotion coming from the lower floor. This was a time to wait for the Players in Hall Plain to come and introduce us to the world. Usually, there was a silent anxiety in the Inn as the survivors waited to find out what next, but this level of noise was unexpected.

The Summoning Net surrounding the Inn was released once all the new players had finished their set up and was transferred to Hall Plain. Once this net was released, the existing players entered the Inn and introduced the world to the new players. My old self detested these guides.

These guides were quite arrogant. They looked upon the new comers like fresh new recruit in the army. Though I do acknowledge that these guides had passed their Rite of Passage, had gone through these transition period and survived through countless hardships.

There was nothing worth listening to. After adjusting to Hall Plain, one begins to get conceited and look upon the new players like “I was like them once.” I remember the player who told me this died three month later.

Although I didn't like these guides, there was nothing much I could do about it. The best thing to do right now was listen to their explanation and go through the Player Academy.

Well, since I already spoke this much, let me explain more about Player Academy. I think the concept of this Academy was quite ingenious. I don't know who suggested establishing it but that person must have been a bit crazy. Rather than spending their early days being clueless about things, the Academy trained the new players. The improvement was remarkable and pointless early death drop significantly.

Regardless, I needed to meet up with the party and clear up all the misunderstanding. After that, I had no idea what to say. Thinking on this, I reached the end of the second floor hallway. Now I just needed to open the door in front of me.

“Fuck you!”

While I was thinking of a lie and how to clear up the misunderstanding, I heard a voice from the door. It was a familiar voice that could be heard from the other side of the door.

“Don't bark at me! You son of bitch!”

“I am telling you, you crazy bitch. I saw it clearly with my two eyes!”

“That means your going blind! You lying asshole!”

“You crazy bitch. You think I was the only one? You think? Borim also saw it. I keep telling you, that crossbow was broken in half!”

Hearing the familiar name, I could guess who was spewing this much profanity. The troublemaker, Park Don-gul. I never have expected him to survive. Well, truthfully, I had lost all interest in them. Dead or alive, I just didn't have it in me to care. Regardless, I decided to be as positive as possible. The early memory was still seared in my mind and the time will come when I can beat him to a pulp.

The other high pitch voice, I recognized it in an instant. The constant friction between the two, Park Don-gul and Lee Yu-jung, what an ill-fated relationship. I clicked my tongue and quietly opened the door.

“Shut...!?”

Hearing the creaking of the door opening, many people turned their gaze to it. Before Yu-jung could tell Don-gul to shut up, she heard the door opening and turned her head up. Seeing this, I laughed awkwardly.

As expected, I was the last person to be transferred. As I took a step outside the door, everyone in the Inn was looking at me. There must be over forty people crowding the Inn. Last time, there was less than twenty. Discounting the number of high-state players, it looks like there was a clear effect of killing the Boss on the sixth day. Last time, about half of the people in this room had been killed.

Walking down one step at a time, I greeted them easily enough.

“Everyone is alive. Glad to see that you are all safe.”

Of course they were alive. I sent them off at the Warp Gate with the utmost care and affection. Even then, I received no response at my greeting. I felt slightly disconcerted while Yu-jung came stumbling towards me.

"Oppa...?"

"Yeah."

She lifted her arms and gently rubbed her hands on my cheeks. Her eyes and lips were trembling, her emotions gushing up, amazed at my sudden appearance. Yu-jung wasn't the only one. The faint hope had become a reality. The party, even Wu Jung-min, looked at me in disbelief.

Yu-jung asked with a strained voice.

“Oppa... Su-hyun Oppa? You are not someone else, are you?”

“Of course, do you think I am a doppelganger? Ou, ouch! Cut that out, it hurts.”

“Congratulations on coming back alive. I never thought there was a chance you would survived... amazing.”

I barely managed to pull Yu-jung's hands off my cheeks, before I heard a husky voice next to me. Turning my head, the voice came from Wu Jung-min. He looked like he had more to say but I shook my head slightly. Wu Jung-min seems to have caught the sign as he closed his half opened mouth. Next, I caught the eyes of Won Hye-su behind Wu Jung-min, who immediately looked away.

An-hyun looked at me with a welcoming expression. Yu-jung's expression was half happy, half crying. Sol was crying out right. An-hyun and I stared at each other for a while. He seems like he wanted to say something, as his lips kept moving but no sound came out.

A case where no matter how much you wanted to speak, the words didn't come. This didn't matter much, but I wanted to get out of the spotlight. The situation was already awkward, but with Sol crying it just became really embarrassing.

I tried to soothe the tearful Sol as I deliberately moved to a corner. Park Don-gul was in that place. Seeing us approaching, he took Lee Bo-rim with him to the opposite side of us.

I waited for the gaze to turn away from us and for the party members to compose themselves. But there was one person bothering me and that was An-sol. She sat next to me, grabbing my cloth and refusing to let go.

I signaled An-hyun for help, but he just opened his mouth and laughed.

“Hyung. I still can’t believe it. You are like a phoenix, coming back from the dead..”

“Haha. That’s a bit too farfetched. I was just lucky, that’s all.”

An-hyun shook his head from my reply. Never mind that, do something about your sister. She’s not a baby, so why is she clutching my cloth so tightly? An-sol didn’t seem to care about my position as she spoke with a shaky voice.

“That’s not it. For me, I saw a miracle. I waited at the bottom of the stairs, thinking maybe... Then Oppa...”

Her voice and her grasp on my cloth became stronger. She couldn’t finish what she was saying as she burst into tears once more. Seeing this An-sol I felt hopeless. But, I felt a bitter in my heart as it was time for me to lie to them.

“Anyways, I am glad to see you all alive.”

“If you were alive, you should have came earlier! You are always making us worry... No, I am sorry Oppa. It wasn’t even your fault...”

I tilted my head at this scolding, apologies and tears from Yu-jung. I never knew these kids were worrying about me this much, I felt happy. Yu-jung clenched her hand into a fist and rubbed the evidence of tears from the corner of her eyes.

“Oppa, tell us. That bastard was telling us that he saw your crossbow broken in half by the Warp Gate. Oppa was gone and the monster had disappeared.”

Ahem. The time had come. How fortunated that I had the foresight to burn the Boss monster’s corpse. But leaving that crossbow behind was quite careless of me. I wanted to avoid the topic but then I felt a cold glare. It was none other than Kim Han-byeol. If I answered vaguely now, I felt I would be in some kind of trouble with her later.

Kim Han-byeol had not spoken a word since I entered the Inn. Except for when she first saw me, her expression hadn’t changed at all. I turned my head for a moment and faced her. Reading the emotions within her eyes, although it was really small, it was mixed.

She felt overall relief but mixed in there was small amount of distrust and suspicion. Han-byeol was definitely not like the others. She had quite a similar personality as me. She never let the situation affect her or showed her emotions, always leaving room for reasoning. She would never grasp the truth about the essence of the matter, but the fact was, she had doubts about me.

The Inn had settled a bit, however that didn’t mean it was silent. Conversations erupted all around between the survivors. I sighed in my heart. I felt I was sighing too much these days. I decided that I would tell them I didn’t remember much of it.

“Yeah. That’s right. I was trying to avoid the monster’s attack... but that thing was targeting my crossbow from the beginning. It

shattered in half immediately. The situation was quite gloomy. Hahaha.”

“Is your left arm fine?”

Kim Han-byeol interject immediately after I finished. She sounded sincerely, however she had an ulterior motive ‘wasn’t the crossbow on your left arm?’ I wetted my lips before answering her.

“The monster attacked with it’s tail. My left arm was raised and the tail grazed passed it, taking the crossbow with it.”

“... Then what happened next?”

“Well, truth be told, I don’t know. What can I say? I can’t remember it well. I really felt like I was going to die, nothing else came to mind. That thing was trying to stomp me to death and I rolled like my life depended on it...”

I explained in a quiet voice, twisting and looping my original experience. It ended with me saying that in the dust cloud, I took my chance and ran with all my strength toward the forest. Everyone nodded at that. Of course, everyone except Kim Han-byeol. Anyone who had faced the Boss monster for three minutes would immediately pick up on that my explanation was riddled with mistruth.

Kim Han-byeol seems deep in thought as she didn’t ask anymore questions. She kept her mouth closed as they all remembered what

had happened and the atmosphere was celebratory on my survival. The suspicion in her eyes had yet to clear up. I decide to stop for now. This spin doctoring was all a delaying tactic on my part anyways.

Before we knew it, the blue light outside the window was fading.

# Chapter 37 - To The Hall Plain! #1

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As soon as the protective barrier disappeared, the previously tightly closed Inn door... opened! As soon as it did so, a group of people immediately entered. Judging by their shabby clothing, they were the users that entered Hall Plain before our group.

The city I'm starting at is a place called Babara. It's known to be the largest city in the Northern Reaches of the country. Since each country only has one large city, they became the base of many users. Each user within the city possessed a keen spirit, giving them a deadly look.

The users all had a design carved over their hearts: a gold lion. It was a design I recognized. The North Country's Golden Lion Clan... I remember them as a clan that had made history in the Whole Plain. Alas, as a result of a difficult expedition and a weakened military, another clan jumped at the chance and attacked them. Thus started their walk towards self-destruction, but that happened later on.

A titan, about 190 cm tall, that wore a colorful robe that didn't quite fit his domineering figure skimmed his eyes throughout the Inn a bit, then spoke with an odd voice.

"The second Inn has more people than I would have thought."

His speech wasn't particularly directed towards us. The users that entered the room after him seemed to hold the same sentiments. Among them, one started to count the people in the

Inn, then spoke.

“Wow... there are actually 43 new users at the second Inn! I haven't seen this many noobs in a long time.”

“Isn't this the most noobs we've had recently?”

“I'm not sure, if compared to last year at just this Inn alone, probably, but what about the other Inns?”

The survivors (new users) looked at the Veterans worriedly. Among the survivors, some were observing the current atmosphere and others were listening to their Veterans' words. For now, I decided to remember their faces.

“I'm sure they're counting them. Hey, Hyun-Woo is coming from the first Inn. Line up.”

After hearing the name Hyun-Woo, the previously chatty users quickly lined up in a straight line perpendicular to the sides of the Inn's door. Hyun-Woo. The Golden Lion Clan. As soon as I connected those two names, I thought of something: if I'm correct, the Park Hyun-Woo that will eventually become the clan's leader is about to appear.

Moments later, someone walked in between the lines of users, straight towards the Inn. He was good-looking guy that had a clean cut and gave a good impression. He looked a lot younger than when I first saw him, but after seeing his eyes, I was certain that he

was Park Hyun-Woo. I was stronger than before, enough that I could activate the third eye.

# Player Status

- \* Name: Park Hyun-Woo (4 Years)
- \* Class: Normal Sword Expert
- \* Nation: Babara (Global City)
- \* Clan: Golden Lion
- \* Alias Nationality: One to leave traces of the sword South Korea
- \* Sex: Male
- \* Height Weight: 179.2cm 68.7kg
- \* Susceptibility: Neutral / Neutral

## Skills

\* Power 90 Endurance 81 Agility 73 Stamina 87 Mana 89 / Luck 60

As expected... he's Park Hyun-Woo. There wasn't a point in looking at his stats, but seeing as how he's only a Sword Expert, it seems like there is still room for him to grow. I think that he'll become a sword master after leveling up another two times or so. No, he definitely can. He was even welcomed as Sword Master during the First Alliance War.

Although I've heard a lot about him, he wasn't the one that I had a sword fight against. His Agility stat was pretty low, but that was evened out by his impressive average mana since he was a sword wielder.

I decided to stop paying attention to him. I heard that he was killed when the Golden Lion was defeated during the Alliance War. More importantly, having an enemy within a big clan will make making alliances with that clan hard.

While I mused within my own world, the rest of the survivors' attention was focused on Park Hyun-Woo. He slowly walked in and carefully observed each of our faces. Soon, a look of surprise appeared on his own.

"Seems like there are a lot of new users here. Probably... over 40?"

“There’s 43. How many survived the first Inn?”

“19. No matter, this is good. Separate them by class and gather them at the square. I’ll have them bring the survivors from the third, fourth and fifth Inn.”

After answering their question and giving the command, Park Hyun-Woo left the Inn with a stern look planted on his face.

---

The square was filled with so many users. It felt nice to be back at Babara Square. There isn’t anything particularly amazing here; if I had to compare it to something, I would say that it’s similar to an outdoor theater.

Directly at the center of the square was a round stage with staircases leading up to it. After separating the new users by class, the Veterans sat down on each of the stairs. Although their butts were chilled by the cold bricks, they endured it and turned their attention towards the center of the stage.

There were many users with the gold lion design on their bosoms on the stage. They each carried a conceited look on their faces, looking at us as they would animals at a zoo.

If there were people who witnessed this and also knew of the Hall Plain issue, they could say that Babara was in a better situation. The Western Country was taken care of by American users and had

an open policy towards the people. This was why they had a large population and were called a “free country.” However, they can’t be considered a peaceful country.

In the Korea-controlled North Country, the Golden Lion Clan was considered the best out of all the clans there. I think I heard someone mention that the rules in the North Country were pretty strict. It makes them look pretty arrogant though.

Right now, I wasn’t with my group. I wasn’t the only one; most of the new users were probably also away from their groups. The Veterans said that they were going to group the new users according to their class.

Momentarily, I was curious as to what An-Hyun and the others picked for their classes, but I decided to find out later. I pushed the thought aside, and soon I turned my attention back to the stage. Park Hyun-Woo and several others were talking amongst themselves. As there was not much else to do, I quietly gathered my mana and amplified my hearing. I was curious as to what they were talking about.

“Report on the number of people by Inn. First Inn, 19. Second Inn, 43. Third Inn, 22. Fourth Inn, 29. Fifth Inn, 17. There’s a total of 130 new users.”

“What about number of users per class?”

“There are 75 Close Range Fighters, 26 Long Range Fighters, 18 Magicians, and 11 Priests. There are no one of secret or rare

classes.”

“... I see. Thank you. Well, let’s begin then. Yoo-Bin. Activate the Voice Amplification magic. Also, bring that guy in front of me here.”

That guy? Who was he talking about? Now that I think about it, there was some sort of commotion when we were leaving the Inn. I couldn’t find out exactly what had happened since I was mixed within the users that went outside after being separated by class.

Soon after, my question was answered. Park Hyun-Woo dragged a brutally beaten guy to the center of the square. As soon as they stepped in the middle, the small whispers disappeared. It was so quiet that I couldn’t even hear people breathe. Park Hyun-Woo continued to drag him with one arm, then threw him up on the stage.

The guy that was thrown onto the stage was Park Dong-Gul. He had foam in his mouth, and his right arm was twisted bizarrely, making him look miserable. I thought that maybe he had lost his mind, because his body would occasionally spaz. The expression on his face made me think that he was experiencing excruciating pain...

Ignoring the condition of Park Dong-Gul, Park Hyun-Woo looked at the new users, and spoke.

“First, it’s nice to meet the new users that passed the Rite of Passage. I’ll skip the small talk since you’ve probably heard most of

it from the Angels. But...”

He stopped talking for a moment before continuing. Everyone’s attention was glued on him.

“However, there are still things that have to be said. Everyone right here right now were once citizens of Korea. Everyone right here right now have passed the Rite of Passage. Between you and me is only one difference: who had entered Hall Plain first, and who had entered Hall Plain later. The important thing is...”

Thanks to the Voice Amplification magic, his booming voice filled every pocket within the square. I’m sure that all 130 people could hear him loudly and clearly. As he slowly strode towards the crown, he stopped in front of Park Dong-Gul’s body.”

“We. Are not the ones that sends you home.”

There was a certain pressure to his words just then. The new users that were listening to his words intently started to feel uneasy, myself included. I don’t think Park Hyun-Woo will put the blame on the new users.

Why? Because I was like that too. Even if you had heard it from the Angels, hearing the words said openly in front of everyone will result in disappointment. After observing the crowd with a stern expression for a second, Park Hyun-Woo continued to speak with a deep voice.

“We were dragged into this crappy Hall Plain. I understand how frustrated you all must feel. But you must understand-we were

once in the same situation that you are in now. I'm sure that you're all curious as to why we're here. We have one goal, and it's to help all of you to get used to Hall Plain. It's to help all of you to survive. It's to help all of you, and provide guidance."

He stopped talking, and glanced down at the body of park Dong-Gul. Even though he was deeply in pain, Park Dong-Gul's body shook, as if in defiance, as if in defence of his remaining pride. However, as soon as his eyes met Park Hyun-Woo's, he lowered them. It served him right.

"To elaborate, you can think of it as a video game where the higher-leveled players are helping the new players. HOWEVER! This man here used profanity and violence towards a user that was here to help! Yes, we guarantee one's freedom-we respect one's freedom. I know that there are users here that don't want our help; there are users here that don't believe our words. To those people, I give a chance right now. If you don't want our help, please leave this square right now. We will not stop you."

Even though he had stopped talking, no one dared to speak. Of course, no one stood up either. Silence enveloped the square. Moments later, after Park Hyun-Woo was certain that no one would decide to leave, he nodded twice and started talking again.

"It seems like no one wants to leave. Then, I'll assume that those here are willing to receive our aid. If at any point an user causes harm towards another, we will take appropriate actions to dispose that that user. Our help will be somewhat painful-but remember, if you feel that the pain is too much, you can give up at any point. Please, keep all that I have said in mind. Yoo-Bin, cancel the Voice

Amplification magic.”

Their voices disappeared as the guy named Yoo-Bin released the Voice Amplification magic. Park Hyun-Woo called over a priest, pointed at Park Dong-Gul, and told him something. I hurriedly depleted my mana to increase my hearing once again.

The priest was the titan that I saw at the Inn. To think that he was a priest! The stark contrast between the stereotypes was totally unbalanced. The titan got down on one knee and lowered his body in front of Park Dong-Gul. Moments later, a bright light enveloped his hand as he moved it near Park Dong-Gul’s right arm.

“Recover.”

Ping!

As soon as the titan whispered the word, he raised his hand that was covered in the bright glow. The light blossomed in the air, and was soon greedily absorbed by Park Dong-Gul’s arm. The previously bizarre looking arm was slowly returning to its original position. A couple of the users that witnessed this sight started yelling excitedly.

Park Dong-Gul blinked his eyes, surprised that he was the one being treated. He slowly sat up and tested his right arm. It moved without restrictions, and seemed fully recovered. Park Hyun-Woo looked at Park Dong-Gul with the same stern expression as before and spoke to him quietly.

“Get up.”

As soon as Park Hyun-Woo stopped talking, Park Dong-Gul immediately stood up. He was weak to the strong, yet he was strong to the weak. Park Hyun-Woo's body language suggested that he didn't like Park Dong-Gul at all. His face scrunched up and spoke growlingly.

“Being hostile towards a new user in Babara is a crazy move. On top of that, he was a fellow clan member! I'll let it slide this time, but if there is a next time...”

From this one sentence, I sensed the violent temper blended in his voice. Park Dong-Gul quickly shook his head in denial; it was as if death emanated from Park Hyun-Woo.

After receiving Park Hyun-Woo's instruction, the priest took Park Dong-Gul and led him to the Close Range Fighter group. Park Hyun-Woo once again turned his attention towards us after affirming that Park Dong-Gul was taken care of.

## Chapter 38 – To The Hall Plain! #2

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After Hyun-Woo had the Voice Amplification Spell casted again, he raised his head and looked at the new users. When they had disabled the spell earlier, no one could hear Hyun-Woo other than those that were next to him.

Compared to when he was dealing with Park Dong-Gul, he seemed more calm and spoke more quietly.

“I understand that you’ve all heard it from the Angels and I know that you have a lot of questions. But, answering all of your questions here would take weeks, even we spent all day answering them.”

Obviously. Since I wanted to enter the User Academy, I quickly agreed with him in my head. Then, as if he had read my mind, he said just what I wanted to hear.

“Also, I’m sure that those who recently passed the Rite of Passage are all very tired. Since all of you agreed to train with us, I’ll only briefly go over our future plans.”

He cleared his throat, then continued.

“In our large city of Barbara there is an User Academy building. Among the new users, is there anyone who have already heard a brief introduction from the assistant Angels?”

He emphasized on the word assistant. The Users looked around, as one by one, they started to raise their hands. As they talked amongst themselves, the number of hands in the air steadily increased.

Just from a quick glance, more than half of the group had raised their hand. In fact, excluding some sections of the group, others had all raised their hands. This meant they rated the Angels, as well as the User Academy, very highly. Seeing that a good amount of people had raised their hands, Hyun-Woo signaled for them to lower their hands.

“Great. This may sound repetitive to many of you, but this is very important, and there are still those that haven’t heard it yet. I will explain one more time. The User Academy is a training institute that helps new users adapt and survive. Since they are an institute that’s widely recognized for their efficiency, they are obligated to receive compensation.”

I’m not sure who decided that the Academy required compensation, but it’s something I can agree with. It’s usually very rare for users to voluntarily acknowledge and support such an organization.

Hyun-Woo began by talking about academy’s history and its foundation. He then explained in detail in regards to the training as well as the benefits they’ll receive once they graduate. To sum up the important details:

The training period at the User Academy is three months. In the beginning, a user’s skills tend to improve at a fast rate. The

Academy provide efficient ways of training for each user according to their skills and their class. As a result, one can expect a faster increase there than training with their bare hands by themselves. Those that receive training at the Academy receive a 20 silver stipend every week. Users that finish the three months training program will receive four attribute points as a reward. This is the general outline.

I honestly just wanted the four points, but as for others, there were many benefits that probably interested them. Although the description of the Academy was exaggerated, they at least provide food, shelter, training and money. These were already a lot of benefits.

Finally, Hyun-Woo explained about how each of the user's skills had a limit. It meant that, although raising skill points can be done by every user, there is a limit that differed between each user. He ended by explaining that the four points that's offered as reward should be used carefully since increasing one's skill point was difficult.

“With that, I have finished explaining your general outline for the next three months. We were originally going to have you all go to your dorms after this, but it seemed like there are some that still have questions. I'll answer three or four before we head to the Academy.”

As soon as he said this, a female user that was part of the Long Range fighters quickly raised her hand. I was curious as to what kind of question this impatient girl had to ask. After Hyun-Woo nodded in acknowledgment, the female stood up from her seat and

spoke.

“Um...will we...be able...t-to survive and...r-return in...one piece?”

Personally, I was really disappointed by her question. To think she would ask such a ridiculous question... I clicked my tongue at the girl's idiotic question and observed Hyun-Woo expression. His expression looked really uncomfortable as he looked over at the girl.

Her question made it sound like she hadn't listened to a word he had said so far. Everyone could tell that he let out a heavy sigh before he answered the question.

“I specifically explained in the beginning that we're not here to send you home. If I knew how to send people home, would I be standing up here doing this? This is something you new users have to figure out together while spending time at Hall Plain.”

Her cheeks turned red after seeing the pitiful look he gave her. Silence filled the plaza for a brief moment, until a male user from the Spell Caster group raised his hand. He had a clean haircut and looked fairly smart. After Hyun-Woo nodded his head, he stood up and delivered his question.

“I understand that this world we are in now is called Hall Plain. Ordinary people like us are called users. And Barbara is the largest city in the Northern Country. Are there other users like us that live in this city?”

Hyun-Woo nodded his head at the question, then answered.

“No. I’m sure you’ve heard it from the Angels already, but Hall Plain is split up into four countries. Barbara is only the largest city in the Northern Country. Other than this city, there are four mid-sized cities and eight small cities within this country. Users like us have been dispersed throughout those cities. I can’t say that the Northern Country is completely safe, but Korean users do have some degree of control around the cities, so it will be fine.”

“You just said Korean users. Does that mean there are users of other nationalities?”

“Yes. Korean users aren’t the only ones in the Hall Plain. The Eastern Country is controlled by the Japanese users. The Western Country is controlled by the American users. The Southern Country is controlled by the UK users. Of course there are many users of various other nationalities within each country. However, this ethnic divide is how they’re currently separated as a whole.”

The second question wasn’t as useless as I had expected. As soon as the male user bowed and sat back down, Hyun-Woo started observing the new users. Since he said he would only take three or four questions, it’s quite likely that this will be the last question.

Seeing as how no one took the initiative, it seemed like everyone knew it too. Then, Hyun-Woo pointed to someone, and as I turned my head I saw a female user with a hand raised.

I was able to see her face after she stood up; I silently cheered inside my head. That last person to stand up was Kim Han-Byul. With her calm and cold face, she silently observed Hyun-Woo. Since I knew of her keen thinking ability, I was really interested in what she was going to ask. I think the boredom that I felt this whole time finally disappeared.

Her soft lips slightly opened and her beautiful voice escaped through them.

“I heard that all the people here are planning on training at this so-called academy. But, what’s your goal for having us train there?”

As soon as she finished, everyone started whispering amongst themselves. Seeing as most of them scrunched up their face, it seemed like they believed that it was a dumb question. Those people were the ones that didn’t understand the true intention behind her question. The small group of people that actually understood the true meaning of her question quietly awaited for Hyun-Woo’s answer.

I was also surprised by Han-Byul’s keen question. Compared to the expression he had when he was answering the first girl, he looked like he was actually contemplating the question. Seeing as he wet his lips, he must’ve been taken aback.

Han-Byul’s question was deeply calculated. Reason and goal wasn’t as important and reason and true goal. She wasn’t simply asking why they had to get training; she was asking for the real reason behind having the users train there and their purpose for

utilizing the academy.

Hyun-Woo hesitated, and kept on opening and closing his mouth. He was very different from when he answered the other questions without a delay. The users started to catch on to his odd behavior since they stopped talking amongst themselves. Slightly uncomfortable, he answered.

“...I have already explained in detail regarding our purpose in utilizing the Academy. The user that asked the question, do you have an issue with the training?”

“It’s not as if I have an issue to talk about. I agree to enter the academy. What I want to hear isn’t how the academy is a necessity; it’s why it is so. Is it truly a training institute that helps new users train and adapt?”

I saw that Hyun-Woo kept his mouth shut. I suddenly recalled her words to me at the hut earlier.

“You’re doing it again. It might work on An Hyun and Yoo-Jung, but it won’t work on me. Don’t try to change the subject.”

Hyun-Woo, too, tried to change the subject. It was like he didn’t know how to answer Han-Byul’s blunt question.

A bitter smile appeared on his face after he bit his lips and kept silent. It was the first time I’ve seen such an interesting expression since entering Hall Plain. Was Han-Byul’s question such a big of a

deal that it caused him such internal strife?

Hyun-Woo wet his dry lips with his tongue and answered in a low voice.

“You’ll... naturally find out in time-whether you’ll like it or not.”

## Chapter 39 – Make An Offer

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“The humans that live in Hall Plain are separated into two major categories. There are the original residents of Hall Plain, and then there are the users that entered Hall Plain through the Angels’ intervention. However, it’s a big misconception if you think that all users are of the same thought.”

“They’re... not the same?”

Hyun-Woo nodded at Han-Byul’s inquiry.

“There are users that are working hard to go back to Earth, and there are those that have settled down in Hall Plain. To be more exact, they’re converting themselves into true residents of Hall Plain. Hm...convert does sound a bit odd. To put it simply, you can think of them as people that refuse to return to Earth.”

He kept on swallowing, which made me think he was thirsty. I wondered what he would say next, and my expectations kept increasing.

“I’m sure your wish to return to Earth is the same as that of the members of the Golden Lion Clan. We’re working hard even as we speak to try and find clues on how we may return. However, the users that have settled in Hall Plain are different-they would like to live in Hall Plain forever.”

“Can’t we just leave them behind and group up with those that want to return to Earth?”

It was a reasonable expectation, but the reality was harsh. Hyun-Woo shook his head at Han-Byul's inquiry.

“To be honest, we can't just separate the users. Hall Plain is not a playground. This is a reality, and Hall Plain is an actual world. As a result, complex situations are appearing and more issues are arising. There are people doing everything within their power to try and stop us from returning to Earth.”

Was he talking about the Vagrants? There was one clan known as the Murder Brigade. While not an official clan, they were one of the well-known clans that Hyun-Woo mentioned. Although they only had 10-some members, they were a psycho clan that felt pleasure from killing people. From what I remember, they were first created right after the recent Alliance War.

The Murder Brigade's dying moment was especially intense. When the Northern Country climbed over mountains and invaded Atlanta (though invaded might not be the proper word), the Murder Brigade was prancing about-going at their usual business-when they accidentally provoked a user from the Red Fang Clan(who owned the largest city in the region). Under the angry retaliation from Clan Leaders Woo Jung-Min and Seon Yoo-Woon, each and every one of them were suppressed.

“To these people, if it meant achieving their goal, they won't hesitate to even kill their own members. I just wanted to warn you all that apart from those that wish to peacefully live in Hall Plain, there are dangerous people too.”

The atmosphere suddenly got heavy. From the new users' point of view, they probably previously believed that all humans were on the same side. The thought that users could be enemies with each other never even crossed their minds. Of course, there were also users who had on an apathetic expression-users like Park Dong-Gul. They've either already committed murder before arriving at Hall Plain, or they've had to commit murder during the Rite of Passage for unknown reasons...

“These users work in the shadows in order to not get caught. Their strength is something that cannot be ignored. Given a chance, they will immediately jump out of the shadows at a moment's notice. Young lady, you asked for the Academy's true motive? This is our answer.”

He quietly stared at Han Byul for a moment before continuing.

“The new users that just recently passed the Rite of Passage will probably be their primary targets. They'll try to be friends with you and fulfill your desires. At the User Academy, we'll teach the new users on how to protect yourselves and others, and we'll teach you about those with evil intentions. The Academy is an institute that serves as a foundation where we provide training so that we can band together and oppose those with ill intentions. For that reason, we agree with the Angels and recommend entering the Academy first. You, new users, have nothing to lose from this.”

In the end, Hyun-Woo's wanted us to team up. We the veteran users will protect you the new users from danger and help you all adapt to Hall Plain. With our help, you new users will be able to grow, and eventually become skilled enough to protect yourselves.

A user that experiences such growth will become valuable to both the city and the country.

Han-Byul sat down after hearing the satisfactory answer. Seeing as the rest of the new users also seemed to agree, they probably sympathized with Hyun-Woo. Except for one person. Except... me. Of course, all that he said was true, and there was nothing wrong with his explanation. Since I wanted to enter the Academy from the beginning, I didn't have any issues. However, he had failed to tell the entire truth.

If we considered the source of the first Alliance War, then his diatribe was irrelevant because he left out all the important parts. The Golden Lion Clan had contributed greatly to the cause of the war. To think that he could still talk like that... made me feel really uncomfortable.

He was working hard to put the Vagrants in a bad light. The Vagrants weren't called vagrants for no reason. There were those that were too extreme and had wanted posters in each city. They weren't welcomed in any city-at least, not in the Northern Country.

I wanted to ask Hyun-Woo a question: Ultimately, aren't you guys are the same as the Vagrants? Of course, I wasn't on the same side as the vagrants. I didn't think the two groups were any different because they both wanted to protect the power they currently had while stripping away the power of others.

There was a time when the Golden Lion Clan took over Atlanta after overcoming a close call with death in the Hall Plain.

However, other clans were lying in wait, waiting for a chance to appear. When it did, the other clans teamed up and, with the support of other countries, managed to take Atlanta for themselves.

There's a famous saying in Hall Plain: Users that understand will gather and form a clan; clans that share a common enemy will gather and form an alliance. It means that in the end, whether they're Vagrants or Clansmen, each will fight when necessary. Hearing him cover that fact up made me angry. Even though it wasn't something new users had to know, to me the words he spouted was pure nonsense.

After calming my anger, I saw Han-Byul sit back down. It seemed like she had somewhat agreed to his words. There wasn't anything that could be done. If you've not experienced how Hall Plain will progress in the future, all of Hyun-Woo's words appeared to be valid. He turned his head to the center of the stage and let out a sigh of relief, probably at the close call with the unexpected question.

"I didn't think that it would take this long to answer a couple of questions. I see that some of you look pretty tired...I think it's for the best to end it here. I recommend resting for the rest of today. Training begins tomorrow. The guides will take you to your dorms."

He once again turned to Yoo-Bin and commanded, "Stop the Voice Amplification magic." Afterward, he turned to the users beside him and issued a few commands. The users then walked towards us as Hyun-Woo stepped down from the stage.

As he stepped down the last step, he looked around at a group of users by the stairs. It was only for a moment, but I saw Hyun-Woo look at Han-Byul. His eyes showed a hint of deep interest in her. I quickly glanced over at Han-Byul and saw them exchange eye contact. At that moment... I felt really uncomfortable.

Although many users wished to join a large clan, most merged with a small clan as large ones only sought those with potential. Joining the clan that represented a large city was a privilege; one that was tempting and hard to refuse.

I believed that Hyun-Woo was interested in Han-Byul because he saw potential in her. And I-I was not quite sure why-but I had a strong feeling that Han-Byul might accept the Golden Lion Clan's offer.

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By the time we arrived at the academy the sky was already dark. The dorms were divided according to class and could satisfactorily fit up to 8 people. An Hyun noticed this and quickly moved to stand beside me. We ended up in the same dorm room.

The beds had just a mattress and two blankets each. One could say that the dorm was in poor condition and quite shabby. Those seeing it for the first time complained, but the users that were used to it didn't say anything and directly went to sleep. The User Academy's system was like that of the military.

With a fishy smile, the training instructor told us we were somewhat free for today. (As soon as I heard his words, I requested for a cigarette. He gave me one without a word). The others, however, immediately went to sleep despite his words.

An Hyun laid down beside me and fell fast asleep, but it made me uncomfortable. I observed his face. He was probably dreaming, as he was smacking his lips. Was he dreaming about eating something? I smirked and thought about how carefree he was.

The User Academy in the Northern Country is widely known to be the country with the most brutal training. It employs unimaginable numbers of training methods. It made worried about the other users because the 13 weeks of training gets harder as it goes.

“ ... ”

I was getting frustrated. I let out another deep sigh. I was wondering what the source of my discomfort was as a thought popped into my head. The scene of Hyun-Woo and Han-Byul looking at each other began to play over and over again in my head.

I tried to push the thought away and go to sleep, but the more I tried to push it away, the more complicated my thoughts became. After tossing and turning for a while, I sat up. I put on the slippers placed on the floor and opened the door to the dorm. The cold air drafting through the dark hallway cooled my body down. I enjoyed the cold air at the moment before taking out that cigarette from my pocket and placed it between my lips.

I looked around to make sure no one was around me. I sent a small amount of my mana to my hand. Fwoosh. Along with the sound, flames birthed and lit the end of the cigarette then quickly disappeared. I took a deep breath.

Sigh.

The male and female dorms were in two different buildings. Surprisingly, Han Byul was categorized into the Spell Caster group. Since her mana level was pretty high, I could understand it. My previous clan, the Road Clan, was of the combat group. Truth be told, I was feeling a bit disappointed.

I first joined An Hyun's group because we had the same goal and they would be useful in the future. Even now, my goal hasn't changed. My thoughts, however, had. I acknowledge the fact that Han-Byul was special in comparison to others, but I didn't think I would be swayed this much by the possibility of losing her.

Was I starting to like her? Or was it... love? I shook my head at the nonsensical thought. The ash broke off slowly dropped through the air at the motion.

I'm the one that knows myself the best. Moreso, I knew myself very well. With my personality, it was impossible that I would fall in love with someone after merely one week. In that moment, I realized the truth. Why was I disappointed that she was a Spell Caster?

From the moment I met her through all of the Rite of Passage, she had reminded me of a woman. That woman was one of the users that I used to follow. I thought... that I saw Han So-Young within Kim Han-Byul. I thought... as a feeling of bitterness started to fill me. I felt pathetic to be contemplating such an irrelevant matter...

I dropped the cigarette on the floor, stepped on it, then continued walking. There were a lot of things I had to do, and a lot of things I had to think about. I had to remind myself to stop thinking irrelevant thoughts and focus.

I still couldn't fall asleep, but I made up my mind to forcefully fall asleep. I even thought about making myself faint as I quietly opened the door and walked back into the room.

## Chapter 40 – Make An Offer! #2

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As soon as we entered the training ground, the instructors shot up a flare signaling the start of hardcore training. A week after the flare had been fired, the Academy proved that their training was the most hardcore out of all the Northern Country's academies. Out of the 130 new users, 17 people— a little over 10%— were discharged for giving up. The interesting thing was that 15 of those users were Close Range Fighters.

I'll say it again: the Northern Country was controlled by Korean users. If there was one thing that differed from other countries, then it would be that Korea required military service. It was required of all adult males, so it wasn't rare to find a user who had served in the military before.

Perhaps, it was because the User Academy in the Northern Country was proud of its foundation that they had a militaristic system. They examine the trainees during training and provide trainees basics like food and clothing, but they controlled our lives by suppressing our freedom.

If it was just the training that was difficult, I would be able to endure it. But, the one thing that users couldn't stand was the training regiment. The training we had to go through in the military was nothing compared to what we underwent here. Most of the users had proved their worth here only after throwing up as they couldn't handle the training.

The special training that took place only on the weekends was the highlight of every week. Oh, days in the Hall Plain were

calculated the same way as Earth. The weekend training took place on Saturday and Sunday of the seven-day week, and was the reason why new users left the academy. There was also a reason why most of the Close Range Fighters left.

That reason was that the weekend training consisted of 1 on 1 battles between users.

Of course, Spell Casters and Priests were exceptions. Spell Casters were required to gather mana, materialize it, and then shoot that mana at a target. However, in the beginning, gathering and controlling mana was difficult. On top of that, there were a lot of information they had to learn. Even if one was to train during the entire 13 weeks, it still wouldn't be enough to learn all the basics. Priests were in the same boat, but since their specialty was in recovery and assistance they were exempt from most of the training.

If you thought that battles were just friendly tussles between users, you're sadly mistaken. On cold days, the users are provided with weapons and are given one rule: was to hurt the other user. Of course, the users do wear protective gear on their vitals— but that was it.

Users do preparation right before each battle. The ones with reputation are often recruited as sparring partners by instructors, but they need to be prepared to take heavy blows. Because of that reason, Priests are always on stand-by.

Even so, the actual training was far worse than anyone could have imagined. No. It was beyond crazy; most of the users cursed

the training and called it insane. Personally, I rated this training very highly because it was like how I had trained An Hyun's group during the Rite of Passage.

No one knows when something nor what will happen in the Hall Plain. Once you were far enough from a city, there wasn't a safe place anywhere. You could get caught in a trap; you could get attacked by a monster; you could encounter a Vagrant. Even though a place like this was heavily influenced by users, no one can know for sure what could happen in undeveloped lands.

Situations could arise that required a user to have good judgment and stay alert. Depending on how fast they react, they could retain their life or lose it in death. If one stands still and thinks about their own reluctance to hurt the other person, they'll just end up frustrated. The weekend training was where users could get used to getting hurt and, at the same time, to hurting others.

If there was one thing that I was worried about, it was that I wouldn't get hurt in combat training. As all I had to do was win every battle, it was impossible for new users to put a scratch on me.

I didn't have any issue winning against a weak opponent, but it was a bit of a burden when fighting against a somewhat-strong opponent. One time, I balanced a match between Woo Jung-Min and I by focusing on defense. During the battle, I countered his attack, allowing me to claim victory.

Since winning was my only goal, it was only a matter of time before I gained some sort of reputation. However, since it was just

among the new users, my reputation wasn't anything amazing. It wasn't uncommon to hear both instructors and users say stuff like, "The overall grade of this batch is pretty high, but among them Kim Soo-Hyun is especially outstanding and will certainly be useful in the future!" As such praise was within my acceptable range, I acknowledged it.

Those with outstanding ability will eventually have their stats revealed without trying to. In the beginning, I had an urge to hide my abilities no matter what— an old habit.

If this keeps up, you'll end up doing the same things in the same situations. There's a possibility this situation might be repeated once again.

User Kim Soo-Hyun. You cannot accomplish anything by yourself.

If I act the same way this time around, I wouldn't be able to do anything again. What Han-Byul and Seraph had said shook my heart. This time, I don't want to lose Yoo-Hyun and Han So-Young. This time, I want to be of help. This time, I don't want a sad ending. This time... I wanted all of us to experience a happy ending.

In Hall Plain, power was one's trust in others, and could be estimated by how many trusted friends one had. Both history and my personal experience proved it. Even the strongest user in history was taken in by an alliance. Then, how much power and reputation does one need in order to gather these trusted friends?

I realized that my thoughts were different from last time. Now that I've entered the Hall Plain, I was willing to do whatever was necessary. As soon as I made up my mind, my actions changed.

No matter how difficult the training, I finished it without a complaint. Even if the instructors were being a bit harsh, I maintained a polite attitude. Since I aligned my attitude with my outstanding performance, I noticed that the instructors started favoring me. (For example, the user that was in charge of my dorm became my cigarette delivery boy.)

Words soon spread about Kim Soo-Hyun, and as a result my relationship with other users started improving. The number of users that wanted to be my friend or wanted to form a good relationship with me kept increasing. I made them think that I had improved by slowly taking my time.

Humans are animals that adapt to their environment. The time required may differ from person to person, but the matter of utmost importance was that they do adapt. Whether or not they adapt decides whether or not they could continue to live.

The second, third, and fourth weeks resulted in a good amount of users giving up. As time passed into the fifth, sixth, and seventh week, however, the number of users giving up decreased. No one gave up during the eighth week. Those left... were the cream of the crop.

Just because a user lasted until now didn't mean that they were

going to survive, just as because a user gave up doesn't mean that they were doomed to die. It was hard to determine the survival rate by just the User Academy as there were so many different variables within Hall Plain. Whatever was possible, was probable here.

After one passes the Rite of Passage and advances to Hall Plain, there's one common requirement to joining any clan in the Northern Country: graduation from the User Academy. Even in other countries, someone that graduated from the User Academy of the Northern Country will receive bonus points from the clan.

Within two years, the users that gave up (if they were still alive then) will probably regret not finishing the training and receiving those four attribute points.

All of An Hyun's group managed to overcome the first segment—the part of the training that I was worried about. None of them, including An Sol, had given up and had completed their training so far.

I had assumed that An Hyun would become a Swordsman because of his skill handling a sword. To my surprise, he picked the lance as his main weapon. I asked for his class, and he replied with Lancer. As his basic physical ability was outstanding (excluding his mana), it was possible for him to wield any weapon with ease.

When Sol got into trouble at the vacant lot, he threw a sword and cut off the Deadman's arm. As a result, I rated his synergy with the sword very highly. If he had chosen the same path as me, I would

have helped him become a Sword Master. However, he said that he gets more excited when wielding a lance, so nothing was to be done.

Still, my curiosity prompted me to ask him as to why he chose a lance.

“Back at the Inn, I couldn’t come to my senses after being told that you were dead. To be honest, the people back there really pissed me off. I kept asking them for more details, but they avoided my question and kept saying the same nonsense over and over... the man there told me to be a swordsman, but I told him to piss off and grabbed a lance out of anger.”

An Sol, who was listening in on the conversation, quipped in and mentioned that An Hyun had said that he was going to be a Spell Caster in the beginning. She said that their Angels were surprised and even giggled. Seeing the two talk so comfortable caused me to let out a silent sigh within me.

An Sol’s decision, however, was within my expectations. Like I had guessed, she chose to become a Priest. An Hyun said that she took a while in the beginning when choosing her class, but she was faster this time than usual. As she didn’t like wielding a weapon, nor did she want to hurt others, a priest was the best option for her.

Yoo-Jung chose a dagger— the same kind of weapon she had used during the Rite of Passage. But surprisingly, this time she chose a two-handed dagger. When I asked her for her class, she replied with Mercenary.

Yoo-Jung was well-balanced, so any close-range class would put her above average. I would've recommended an assassin, but a mercenary was okay too since they could wield many different weapons.

As new users' information could be changed at any time, it wasn't rare for them ask about each other's attribute points and reveal their own at the academy. I gathered my members and warned them to not share details of their attribute points and other stats with neither the other users nor with the instructors.

I warned Sol three times. She didn't know my reasoning and simply smiled. I felt like they started to treat me different after the matter with the Boss Monster.

One person had completely separated herself from the group. As my name became increasingly well-known within the academy, An Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung all carried a proud look on their faces. Even though they didn't say anything, I knew that they didn't think of me as a stranger anymore. All of them... except for Han-Byul.

Han-Byul kept her distance from the group. After the first training segment was over, we met up. When asked about what class she chose, she answered coldly.

“Soo Hyun just said to not tell anyone our information.”

I told her that what I wanted them to keep secret was important

information, not their class. Giving away your class was something that couldn't be avoided. On the outside, I just smirked, but on the inside, I couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness. Han-Byul probably felt it too, as she quietly said that she was affiliated with magic. I ended up nodding instead of verbally responding. Of course, I could've easily found out her class with the Third Eye, but I didn't. I could assume her class by her stating that she was affiliated with magic.

There were many times when she missed our meetings. I understand that Spell Casters had a lot to memorize and practice, but the same goes for the other classes. Sol told me that Han-Byul said that she didn't have the time to meet, despite the fact that we only meet for one or two hours once a week.

“Hey, don't worry yourself over her. She's in a different dorm from us anyways. Just let her be. To be honest...I never liked Kim Han-Byul.”

“That's a bit harsh. But still...”

“What do you mean but still? From the rumors... you know the user that was explaining in front of everyone when we left the Inn? That male user. I heard someone mention that he and Han-Byul were talking to each other. That traitor.”

A bitter smile appeared on my face when Yoo-Jung called Han-Byul a traitor. My worried assumption was becoming the reality. The fact that she got an offer from the Golden Lion Clan wasn't something that could be blamed on her. It's only the eighth week and I've received offers from five clans. Among the list was the

Golden Lion Clan.

However, Han-Byul was definitely keeping her distance from us. She joined our conversation from time to time, but she never talked except for the one time she looked at me and asked what I was going to do after graduation. I told her I was still thinking about it.

After that day, I was able to think of Han So-Young and Kim Han-Byul as two separate entities. I decided to not concern myself about her anymore. Of course, I hoped that she would stay with us, but I wasn't going to force it if she didn't want to. I won't cling to those that want to leave, and those that I accept will undergo a thorough examination first. My goal was a small group; large groups didn't appeal to me.

There's this thing called fate. It's when you form a relationship with a person. I never believed fate to be coincidental, but that it was something one could control. I believed in that fate. I've experienced immense power thanks to the bond created through that fate.

I decided to treat Kim Han-Byul as an example of fate. If we're fated to meet, we will— but if not, I will let you go. I have the ability to form connections with people; it's a stupid idea to hold onto a dubious relationship.

As soon as she stepped out of Han So-Young's shadow, I was able to see things that I wasn't able to before through my new perspective. Rather than holding onto Kim Han-Byul for her stats, it was more beneficial to my goals to sift through the users that

have passed the first segment of training for more talent. Although there weren't a lot of new users with similar skills, I'm sure that there must be someone out there.

## Chapter 41 – Make An Offer! #3

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The users grew somewhat accustomed to the training during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh weeks. When they began the first week, they had a hard time just running, but now they could easily run 20 laps with a smile upon their faces. Seeing that no one gave up and were all giving it their all made a smile appear on my face.

As of now, there were only 80 users left. However, to have 80 users graduate from the User Academy at the same time was rare. As the last weeks of training quickly approached, the atmosphere within the academy became weird.

For example, the instructors' attitudes towards the new users changed. Not all of the instructors were from the Golden Lion Clan. A good 70% were indeed members of the clan that represented the country's largest city, but the remaining 30% were part of clans that represented various other smaller and ordinary cities.

The instructors had yelled continuously at the users in the beginning, but now they became gentler. An instructor calling out one or two of the users to go out to eat became an ordinary happenstance. There were also times when users were offered the chance to go out and eat with an instructor right after training ended. Of course, only skillful users ever received these invitations.

The dorm instructors were changed, which really surprised me. A beautiful female instructor was in charge of the male dormitory, while a handsome male instructor was in charge of the female

dormitory. Anyone with half a brain would be able to figure out the Academy's purpose in doing so. As each training session was finished quicker now, we naturally had more time to meet with others. Whenever I met with An Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung, they always looked at me and questioned me about what I was going to do after graduation.

“What are YOU thinking about doing?”

“What do YOU think? I'm sure you've gotten plenty of offers. Are you planning on joining a clan?”

“...”

I appreciate that they wanted to follow me, but this... this was too much. It would have been a different story had they a plan of their own and only consulted me for my opinion, but them wanting to just depend on me almost makes me want to leave them as soon as possible. As I tried to subtly hint my thoughts, Yoo-Jung started to pout.

“Who ever said we weren't thinking on our own? We just wanted to hear your plan first!”

“I'm still thinking. What will you do if we have different plans?”

“What do you mean? I'll obviously follow you!”

“Of course, of course. I trust you. Cheer up!”

An Hyun, who was listening to our conversation, commented while nodding his head sagely. They always depend on me for advice... When I asked them why, An Sol replied with a smile: “If we listen to you, good things always happen.”

A bitter smile crept up on my face, and I shook my head. The devotion formed from both the experiences during the Rite of Passage and my forming a reputation at the User Academy caused my little group to heavily rely on me. Secretly, I was glad that they relied on me so much although I decided to not say it. I’m sure I’ll leak it out before we graduate anyways, but now was not yet the time.

We never saw Kim Han-Byul anymore. From what I’ve heard, she and Yoo-Jung make eye contact they just pass each other without saying a word. In addition, many of the female users assume that she’ll be a top ranker, making her a valuable target to be pulled in by many clans.

Users that are somewhat capable are probably starting to choose which clan they will decide to join, while others haven’t received a single offer. Those users that haven’t were probably getting worried as graduation was fast approaching and they didn’t have a plan for what was after.

Even though they might not be able to join a large clan, graduates can join one of many of the smaller clans from the smaller cities. Of course, if possible they would like to join a large clan. According to some rumors floating around, there are even female users that are doing some daring things in order to force this possibility into

reality. They would get really friendly with the instructors, and even seduce them with their own bodies. I could tell that there was even competition among these girls.

Seeing that users started to take things easy as the days passed, I advised them to continue focusing on their training until graduation. There was a reason why users were to spend three months at the academy. Although it may differ from user to user, the 90th to the 100th days of training was when a user's attributes would increase the most.

They complained at first, but immediately stopped after hearing that they wouldn't be able to increase their attributes later on no matter how much they wanted too. To be a good example, I put in that much extra work into my training. In order to become a Sword Master, I haven't skipped out on even one day of training.

Time passed just like that and graduation season was fast approaching.

\*

It was the day before graduation. The throng of users were slowly preparing to leave the academy. The usually strict instructors didn't say much today and let us freely choose how to spend our time. Users either chose to pack their personal belongings or to talk with others.

The day passed by so quickly that soon it was already night. As it was the last night, I decided to have dinner with my roommates.

The instructor told us to not get too crazy before letting us go. The users from the other dorms also had similar plans.

It wasn't anything fancy, really. We were just given dried meat and drinks. Many of the users that haven't had a taste of alcohol for this whole time jumped at the sight and happily chugged it. An Hyun and I shared a gaze, lightly nodded our heads in sync and stood up from our seats. Yoo-Jung had suggested that we sneak out of our dorms and celebrate amongst ourselves.

Hyun and I managed to successfully walk out the door. Everyone present was pretty much drunk and shouting celebrations like "We made it!" while having their arms around each other. In that kind of atmosphere, sneaking out was a piece of cake.

I searched my pockets out of habit before realizing that I didn't have any more cigarettes. I think I left it back at the dorm. I quickly told An Hyun to head over to the rendezvous first before turning and making my way back. An Hyun tried to persuade me to hold off smoking till another time, but being the heavy smoker that I was, I had developed a habit of smoking while drinking.

After sending An Hyun on first, I returned to our dorm, grabbed the cigarette, and walked out again. We had decided earlier to meet at a corner of the Academic Information Building. It was a pretty daring decision on our part to meet there, but it was highly possible that our little escapade would be overlooked even if we did get caught.

The sunset caused shadows to stretch all over the ground. I strolled across the large (and currently empty) training ground.

Impatient, I started to walk faster towards the building. As I was about to pass the bathroom...

“Uhn... ah... ah... gahhn~...”

I heard an odd... moan escape out of the bathroom. It was like my sensitive hearing didn't want me to miss it. Curiosity got the best of me, and I ended up opening the bathroom... doors... slowly... I tried to open it carefully, but a creaking sound filled the surroundings. Before I could worry about the sound, a strange smell wafted by my nose from inside the bathroom; my body immediately formed goosebumps.

“Ahhh... huh...MNNNH! ... ha... ha... ha...”

Huh. The bathroom was a mess. As I slid my eyes around my room my eyes first caught the clothes that were strewn all over the floor, then a person wearing an instructor's hat. Under his stomach was the source of the moaning. The girl's black hair was spread across the floor, while her slim legs were spread apart and her hips were lifted in the air. I've... seen that face before...

At closer inspection, the user on top of her was definitely an instructor. The harder he pushed his hips into her, the more her body rocked back and forth while loud moans escaped her clenched lips.

“Be... quiet! Your... moans... are... too LOUD!”

“Ahhnnn!~ It’s ... because you’re... being... so ROUGH~... with... me... ah... ah... mnnn...!”

After their exchange of words ended, the instructor moved his hips more rhythmically. He decided to showcase his overflowing strength by grabbing the girl by the waist picking her whole body up — with him still snugly inside. The female user hugged him tightly.

It was obvious that the two were enjoying their moment. Then the entranced female started speaking and he stopped moving.

“You PROMISED~, right? You’ll... recruit me into your clan?”

“I told you, don’t worry about it. Wait for me after the exit ceremony. I’ll come and get you.”

After they finished talking, he started to move his hips again. Lewd moans floated about the bathroom once again. I understood the situation after hearing their conversation, so I closed the door. Although it didn’t seem like he forced her into it, this kind of situation was kinda unavoidable. Even if the Northern Country had stricter rules than others, nothing could be done if a female user wanted to use her body.

I thought that I should hurry and meet the others, so I turned around and-

Gasp!

“ ... ”

I reflexively gasped. I wasn't sure when she had appeared, but Han-Byul was staring at me from behind. I was surprised that I hadn't detected her presence earlier, even if I wasn't really on guard. I think... that I was too focusing on the couple's lovemaking since I hadn't seen such things in a while. I calmed myself down before speaking.

“You surprised me. How long have you been standing there?”

“I went to your dorm because there was something I had to talk to you about, but you weren't there. On my walk back, I saw you walking in and coming back out of the dorm so I decided to follow you.”

“Th-then, inside the bathroom...?”

Did you see it? was the silent question that I wanted to ask, although I think that she understood. As her face immediately flushed red and she avoided eye contact, she may have seen it from the very beginning. I felt like I was caught, but I confidently walked away as I did nothing wrong. It was necessary for use to leave this place so that them two could enjoy their time together.

I walked slowly in order to be quieter. I headed in the direction of the Academic Information Building. Han-Byul jogged towards me, then timed her steps to match with mine after she had caught up with me. We walked together side by side, under the glow of the

moonlight. Maybe it was a result of the awkward situation we had glimpsed just now, but between us was only silence. Eventually, it was broken by Han-Byul.

“The female user that was in there... was probably Lee Ji-Young.”

“Lee Ji-Young...? I think I’ve seen her a couple of times before.”

“You don’t know of her?”

Hearing her answer made me confused, and it was plastered on my face. Of course I didn’t know who Lee Ji-Young was. She wasn’t exactly a skilled user nor was she something that was often friendly with me, so how would I have got to know her? Honestly, she was pretty, but when compared to Yoo-Jung, Sol, or Han-Byul, she could only be called average looking. I switched to a stern expression before answering.

“Of course I don’t. How could I have? I’ve never even talked to her.”

After hearing my answer, Han-Byul was visibly relieved. I became curious about this Lee Ji Young. What is it about her would cause Han-Byul to be relieved after I said that I’ve no relation with the girl? Before I could further muse on it, Han-Byul spoke.

“It’s better if you don’t know. Her reputation among us isn’t that

great either. As you witnessed just now... those rumors that are spreading were true. Well, I never thought that I would see it happening in person. Anyways, why were you there?"

"We decided to celebrate our graduation by eating together. On the way to the rendezvous, I heard weird noises coming from the bathroom and decided to investigate. Turned out that they were doing... what they were doing. Anyways, since you're here now, wanna come with me?"

You'll go too, right? was the question that I wanted to ask, but seeing as how her relations with the others wasn't all that great, I decided not to. She tilted her head down and stared at the floor for a moment. I thought that her ears poking through her long black hair was so adorable. While contemplating that important matter, I saw her mouth open.

"I...wanted to talk to you for a moment."

Did she just say that she wanted to talk to me? There wasn't a reason for me to avoid her, so I nodded my head. Now that I think about it, it's been awhile since the two of us have talked alone.

"I got an offer from the Golden Lion Clan."

"...Yeah."

"They rarely accept new users, but they said they were increasing the number of recruits this time around. They also said that they'll

provide a lot of help to Spell Casters so they can grow faster. Also... they said that if I joined their clan, I'll be a recommended candidate for a clan manager position.”

After her words was just silence. I had known that they would try to recruit her from the very beginning, but her words after surprised me. I didn't really understand what she had meant by “they would help the Spell Casters grow.” Nevermind that, I wanted to check my hearing when she mentioned the recommendation. Even if Kim Han Byul had outstanding stats, a recommendation to a manager position for a new user was extremely rare.

If she had a secret class or even a rare class, it would be understandable, but— as I was thinking, I had a realization and stopped walking. Han-Byul looked at me with a questioning expression. I activated the Third Eye.

# Player Status

- \* Name: Kim Han-Byul (0 Years)
- \* Class: Jewel Mage Beginner
- \* Nation: Unsettled
- \* Clan: Unsettled
- \* Alias/Nationality: Nova, One who Radiates Beauty / Korean1
- \* Sex: Female (22)
- \* Height/Weight: 170.5cm / 45.0kg
- \* Susceptibility: Lawful, Chaos

## Skills

\* Power 44 Endurance 52 Agility 64 Stamina 48 Mana 82 /  
Luck 62

“Soo-Hyun?”

I was in a dazed state, and nodded my head instinctively to Han-Byul’s call. Why? and How? were both questions that filled my head; I felt that I needed to clear my confusion.

“You said to not tell other people about our information. They said that they’ll provide a lot of help to Spell Casters so that they can grow.”

A Jewel Mage will require a clan’s assistance in the beginning to grow. Since they use jewels, raising a Jewel Mage was costly. However, that wasn’t important right now. Kim Han-Byul never mentioned to me that she acquired the Jewel Mage class. The fact that she was going to be recommended for the manager position meant that she probably already revealed her class to THAT guy.

That moment, I felt a sense of betrayal flood through my body... but I calmed myself down. I told myself earlier that I would treat her like fate and would let her go if the time came, but seeing that I felt that way for even just that one moment meant that, somewhere within me, was the feeling of regret.

Jewel Mage is one of the secret classes. Truth be told, if she had told me from the beginning I probably would've treated her differently. However, I don't plan on thinking on it purely from my objective point of view. That was something that I despised the most.

I decided to calm myself, think rationally, and organize my thoughts. From now on, Kim Han-Byul will be just another user instead of a younger sister I got to know.

"I heard that you got an offer from the Golden Lion Clan as well."

Seeing as Kim Han-Byul spoke the words with a calm expression, I decided to answer with a stern mask.

"I told them I would think about it."

"Have you decided now?"

"Yeah. I'm going to decline. I don't plan on joining a clan."

"... Why?"

After hearing that I planned on declining their offer, I could feel that she was physically startled.

I stopped talking and started walking again. She, too, started walking again and continued to follow me. I turned around and

looked into her eyes as she looked into mine. In that moment, we shared a complex, frustrating feeling that couldn't be expressed with words alone through our shared gaze.

## Chapter 42 – Make An Offer! #4

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I decided that if there was a chance, I would let Han-Byul go while we were drinking. Since it's likely that she'll leave us, I thought that it wouldn't matter if I was honest about my feelings. I did feel a bit of regret, but it was obvious that we both had a change of heart.

“Why... is a difficult question to answer.”

“Is it difficult... because it's me asking?”

I noticed her emphasize the word “me”, and simply shook my head in response. That wasn't my point.

“That's not it. Do you remember our conversation when we were talking in front of the stairs of the cabin?”

“... Yes.”

“I... um... was able to think about a lot of things during these last three months. My way of thinking changed after seeing this place called Hall Plain. I've decided that I wouldn't join any clans— even if it was the Golden Lion Clan that offered.”

Even though I made my answer vague, Han-Byul was clever enough to see through it. She contemplated my words, then looked at me with a surprised look on her face. It seemed like she understood what I planned to do.

“Then, will you make a new clan?”

“Something along those lines. I’ve been toying with the idea of making one. There’s also the issue that the others weren’t offered the chance to join the Golden Lion clan but I want to stay with them.”

“I too...”

Han-Byul instinctively opened her mouth, but she quickly bit her lips. I felt her breathing become rough and saw a conflicted expression crawl up her face. She clamped her mouth for a moment and then as if she had finally made a choice, started speaking louder and more confidently than before.

“I feel that way as well. As I have said before, my way of thought has changed compared to before I entered Hall Plain. You were amazing during the Rite of Passage. You also proved that you were different from others by your performance after you entered the User Academy. I’m sure I understand your skills more than anyone. But...”

That word. But. It signaled her preparation to start talking about what was really on her mind. I carefully prepared to listen to her words with melancholy written all over my face.

“Hall Plain is an enormous place. It’s so large that anything can happen. It’s not like the Rite of Passage where one person can resolve everything with their skills. Wait. You’re probably about to

say this: I had three other people with me.”

I nodded my head in agreement. Han-Byul continued talking while looking at me with a cold expression.

“I’ll say it now. It’s not that I’m trying to insult any of them, but... I still feel like... You may not acknowledge it, but it feels like you were doing everything. It’s dangerous for a whole group to rely on a single person in Hall Plain.”

Han-Byul wasn’t belittling their skills. She was pointing out their skill level and their attitude towards me. Basically, she meant that no one can do anything alone here and she wasn’t wrong. However, there’s one thing she overlooked that she can’t.

She took a deep breath and seemed like she had finished saying what was on her mind. I gave her time to catch her breath as I organized my thoughts. Then, I carefully began to speak.

“You seem to be very single-minded.”

“.....”

“It’s good to think rationally, but you tend to think in one direction.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I mean that you shouldn’t judge other people according to your standards.”

Hearing my cold voice for the first time, Han-Byul kept her mouth shut. I started at her coldly. I kind of felt bad after seeing her lips tremble a bit; maybe it was due to the fact that I’ve never spoken to her in this kind of tone before. I thought it was necessary since I decided to treat her as just another user.

“I’m...sorry about that. But I thought... I thought that you and I were similar... always rational...”

“Similar. Yes, that’s what you thought. However, I don’t think you can think rationally when it comes to joining a clan. Especially if it’s joining the Golden Lion clan.”

“...How come? Are you saying that I’m making the wrong choice?”

“Is it that important whether you’re right or wrong? No matter what kind of choice a person makes, there are always pros and cons. isn’t it considered rational decision making when one makes places themselves in the center of it and consider all the different factors?”

Kim Han-Byul made a rational decision based on the present. I made a rational decision based on both the past and the future. Despite my reasoning being simple logic, she looked confused. For the first time ever, I truly felt frustrated looking at her. We weren’t on the same wavelength anymore.

“The Golden Lion clan is both the best and also the largest clan in the Northern Country. What I’m about to tell you is a secret within the clan, but they’ve already built a base and are now preparing to advance into the mountains. They’re prepared, and they have a plan. I just don’t understand what advantage there is in following you and not joining them.”

“Who can guarantee that their advancement plan will succeed? They told you that they’ll recommend you for a manager position, but have you thought of the implications behind doing so? No. More so, do you truly believe that you’ll be able to trust the users within that clan?”

I said all this with a harsh tone. Despite that, Han-Byul simply stood there and listened to my words. Silence occupied the space between us, and coldness made up the atmosphere surrounding us. I was going to continue talking, but she spoke first.

“Are you... saying that you can be trusted?”

“.....”

One question. All she asked was only one question. The smothering silence between us seemed to chill and get more suffocating because of that one question. The only thing I could hear was our breathing. There were so many feelings on display on her face. Anger, sadness, regret were in the company of other negative feelings. This was the first time... I saw such a display of feelings on her face.

I carefully opened my mouth. My response, however, was filled with pure disappointment.

“You asked me a few months ago, about why I acted the way I did. If I were to answer that question now. I... “

I...

“I wanted to be the group’s shield. I wanted to give you guys my trust and in return receive your trust. If you haven’t realized yet, I have a hard time trusting people. I’ve thought about being independent. But like you’ve said, I can’t do things by myself. That is an obstacle I can’t overcome.”

I took a deep breath before continuing.

“That’s why I made the choice of choosing the trust the people that I started with. These people can learn to trust me, and these are people I can learn to trust. We are pretty much a small clan already, after all. When I eventually do form the clan, it would be optimal to have a couple people that I could truly consider family.”

Han-Byul’s eyes shook as I talked. The way her lips slightly trembled suggested that there were unspoken words she wished to make heard. However, the Academic Information building started to appear before our eyes.

There was a time when I and she were placed upon a split path.

At that time, she had chosen to follow my lead. And now, further along that path, we've encountered another split. I've chosen my path, but she hasn't yet.

I calmly walked up the stairs, then grabbed the handle of the door. Han-Byul didn't move from her position. I pulled the door. It opened smoothly with nary a sound. I walked in.

Han-Byul didn't follow me.

---

An Hyun and the others seemed to have already drank a lot by the time I arrived. In the end, I didn't get to say what I wanted to say. Seeing them laugh, I let out a sigh deep within me. I started to feel cranky that these guys wouldn't understand my pain. They were... so easy going...

But I decided to hide that feeling. We might never experience such lightheartedness ever again. All of us will be walking a difficult road starting tomorrow. I still think of the User Academy as a heaven within hell.

They soon finished drinking. An Hyun and Yoo-Jung started singing and eventually passed out. Thankfully, Sol was awake so we each grabbed one and lugged them back to their dorms. I placed An Hyun on one side of the room before laying down and organizing my thoughts.

My thoughts have changed thanks to this place. There were a lot

of things we had to take care of right away. First, we have to receive our attribute point rewards and leave Barbara immediately. I fell asleep after thinking about another few items.

The next day. The morning of the big day finally arrived.

Frankly, graduation and the exit ceremony were boring. There were a lot of words spoken, but all they told us was that we did a good job graduating and that they hope that we contribute to the welfare of the Northern Country.

“You have completed the User Academy of the Northern Country’s largest city, Barbara. Your reward is 4 attribute points.”

After everyone received their points, the users split up into two groups. There were those users that received an offer from a clan, and those that didn’t. The users that received an offer were welcomed into the various clans, but those that hadn’t simply stood there.

For those that hadn’t been given an offer, there are still many clans in smaller ordinary cities. Seeing these users lingering around after everything was over made me feel a bit bad for them. It wasn’t any of my business though.

There are clans in ordinary and smaller cities. Seeing them linger around even after everything was over made me feel a bit bad for them. It wasn’t any of my business though.

I planned to run over to the warehouse to get the items I purchased with GP, but I couldn't due to the guys gathering around me: An Hyun, Lee Yoo-Jung, and An Sol. As soon as the four of us gathered, I could feel clan recruiters eying us. We had rejected their offers, and it seemed like they had a sense of lingering regret.

Despite the fact that An Hyun didn't receive as much attention due to me, Woo Jung-Min, and Seon Yoo-Woon, his skills were enough to receive offers from clans. Yoo-Jung's skills were also above average. Both of them received offers from mid-sized clans, but they rejected them all because of me.

The gem of the group was Sol. She was the Brilliance Priest, the leader of all priests. That was the class that was as representative of the female users as the Queen of Shadows. Even if she hadn't acquired this class, her stats for a beginner was already high. Her mana was at a 75 while her luck was at 100.

Surprisingly, Sol didn't receive that much attention. I heard from An Hyun that she had a hard time controlling her mana. As she was a beginner, it would have been weird for her to be able to control it anyways. She'll become more valuable in time after she gets used to it...

The recruiter of the Golden Lion Clan looked at the gathering of users with disgust. I only found out after graduation, but of the five users that they offered the chance to join their clan, only two users accepted.

"I'm sorry, but I have a group already. I don't plan on leaving

them.”

As I once again politely refused their offer (for the last time), An Hyun and the others were obviously feeling bad for me. It seemed like they believed every word out of my mouth. This sort of misunderstanding wasn't a bad feeling, but I still felt uncomfortable. I decided that I would tell them the truth when the time was right.

As we left the Academy's front gate, new users and veterans alike could be seen socializing. One could see many various clans all at once.

There was something that caught my eyes. It was that wench, Lee Ji-Young. It looked as if she had joined a pretty popular clan since she had on an arrogant expression and looked down at the users that didn't receive any offers. She was standing next to that instructor, with her arm linked with his. She seemed nervous on the inside. I was curious as to how her expression would change in the next six months. I kept walking.

I thought that Kim Han-Byul was somewhere around here because I felt someone staring at me. I turned around, and saw Han-Byul staring at me and the rest of the group. However, I no longer wanted to be involved with her. Since I haven't heard anyone else speak of any rumors of a Jewel Mage, the clan was probably keeping it a clan secret.

The others carried excited expressions as they followed behind me. As we were preparing to leave, I heard someone call my name. I turned around, and this time I spotted Woo Jung-Min and his

group. The first thing he chatted about was me refusing the Golden Lion Clan's offer. They probably declined as well, as I had assumed.

He offered us the chance to work with him as we continued to talk. I was actually a little tempted to accept. Before they have the chance to team up with the Red Fang Clan, it would be better to wipe them out while we have a chance. But before I could answer, his member Won Hye-Soo and my Lee Yoo-Jung looked at each other with open disgust, effectively ending the conversation.

Seeing that Won Hye-Soo glance at me, I thought that she still carried hard feelings for me. I understood that feeling, that pain. However, I couldn't help but see her in a bad light as she continued to act the way she did just now again and again. I'll let her go this time, but I'll fix that bad habit of hers next time. We quickly bid our farewells.

I turned around to find my teammates looking at me with odd expressions. I'm sure that they declined offers from decent clans just to follow me. Although they weren't independent just yet, I wanted to use them

To do so, I had to first tell them of my plan.

# Chapter 43 – Prepare For Emergencies #1

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Each city within Hall Plain was structured like a web. Even though the cities that existed within various countries were in many different locations, they all look similar, yet they also all serve different purposes. If you looked at any two cities individually, they looked different. But when all the cities are looked at as a whole, you would notice that they all play a role and are linked with each other,

The Northern Country that we were currently at also had many cities. Barbara, the largest city, was located in the center, while the city Prinsika was to the east, Halo was to the west, Kan was to the south, and Pamela to the north. These four, the “ordinary” cities, were located around Barbara. Beyond each of these cities were two smaller cities that were under their jurisdiction and would aid each other in times of need.

In more detail, the smaller cities around Prinsika was Eden to the northeast and Dana in the southeast. The smaller cities around Halo was Dorothy to the west and Monica to the southwest. The smaller cities around Kan was Coran to the southeast and Monica to the southwest. The smaller cities around Pamela was Mule to the northeast and Montana to the northwest.

One large city. Four ordinary cities. Eight small cities. Say that a small city near Kan met trouble. Mid-sized clans in Kan would immediately team up, along with the Southern Freedom Alliance, and help the city together. Normally, however, there was only one representative clan in each city that took care of matters.

When clans take care for a city individual members are assigned jobs that fit their position. This would be unheard of in the Southern Country, as they value freedom above all else. However, it was possible in the Northern Country of today because the Golden Lion clan was the clan that was in power.

Anyone that wanted to get to the Central Country from the Northern Country has to pass through Kan, Coran, and Monica first. Each of these cities had their own policies that one has to follow. They served as outposts that you had to pass through in order to reach the Central Country. On the other side of the Northern Country, Pamela, Mule, and Montana to the north were close to undeveloped locations. Those to the north of Pamela guarded the undeveloped land and made sure that it was safe. I heard from an instructor that they weren't allowed to explore and attack, but they did so anyways.

Everyone from the Northern Country knew that if you took just one step into the Central Country from the Northern Country, you would be under the jurisdiction of their large city, Atlanta. However, the Northern Country didn't possess enough power to take over that city. Not... yet. I was sure that the "truth" that I had remembered will happen soon, and that feeling was bolstered by Han-Byul's revealing of the Golden Lion clan's plans that night.

I originally planned on heading to the small city Montana, but I decided to change my course and head to Mule. There was a lot of factors that went into this decision, but the biggest reason would probably be An Hyun.

I don't remember all the details, but there was a rare class that

wielded a lance called the “Energy Spearman.” I wasn’t sure exactly where or how it came to be, but I know that it was found within a cave in Mule. If one of my members can get a rare class, then it’ll be a great addition to my power. Thus, I decided to go check it out.

“I plan on going to Mule first.”

Everyone carried a confused look after I told them I was going to Mule. The other users were either heading towards a big or ordinary city, but the fact that I wanted to go to a small city probably caught them off-guard. An Hyun’s face was filled with curiosity as he asked the reason for going to Mule.

“Soo-Hyun, isn’t Mule the northernmost city? Also, I heard that that city was only recently developed, so it’s still pretty dangerous. People said that it’ll be dangerous to go there if you’re not skilled enough because of all the vagrants there.”

An Hyun would be right... normally. I wanted to travel a bit further than I would otherwise in order to train them to gain the skill to judge how things work in Hall Plain. Such things required experience. Regardless, I was proud that An Hyun was able to think of that, so I patted his head. He raised his head with a confused look but didn’t push my hand away.

To explain my reason for going to Mule, then I would first need to explain Golden Lion clan’s plans. As An Hyun and Yoo-Jung had already either assumed or heard the rumors about them elsewhere it didn’t take long to explain. Sol had been quiet for a while, and when I turned my head to look I noticed that she was staring at my

hand that was still on Hyun's head. I quickly put my hand down.

Many varying issues had to be resolved first before advancing into Atlanta. If you were to consider all of the various factors, then stabilization would be the word that encompassed all of it. Have the nearby monsters been taken care of? Was it safe within the territory? Is there anywhere that hasn't been attacked? Lastly, can the Vagrant's intervention be prevented beforehand?

Stabilization was important within Hall Plain. If cities under a country's control were stable, they would be able to recover from disasters even if the military fails. Since the Central Country had a strong foundation, it would be difficult for anyone to advance into the Central Country with malicious intent. The problem was that users had different interpretations of what is "stable."

It was hard to say that the Northern Country was safe; cities like Mule were still being developed. Despite that, the Golden Lion clan was already planning for its expedition. The clan, known as the best clan in the Northern Country, will collapse due to their hasty decision.

I thought back to my experiences with the first war in my memories. One of the reasons for their failure was that their method of stabilization was insufficient. The only success during the war was with the city of Halo. There, a large war took place between the joint Alliance of the Golden Lion clan and the Sun Clan, who represented Halo, and the Vagrants. In the end, the clans won.

However, the clans were too flushed with their success. The

Vagrants were called so because they were a discrete group that had users spread everywhere. As the clansmen's lives were typically short, they weren't satisfied with just one victory. Despite that, they celebrated too early and advanced into the mountains. It resulted in a tragedy that could have been avoided otherwise.

The first time they advanced into the mountains was about six months after I initially entered Hall Plain. This time around, since I spent 13 weeks at the User Academy, I still have around three months left before they begin their fated expedition. I had about a 100 days to become as powerful as I can.

In a sense, Mule and Montana were the optimal cities to go to for my plan. Right now, there were small hints that getting rid of the Vagrants was a part of their plan for this expedition. Sensitive users will be able to infer that preparations for war were beginning in the Northern Country.

Vagrants typically hid in shadows and carried out their plans from within. Before their group gets attacked, they will most likely meet in the Western Country and prepare an ambush. If my assumptions were correct, then the West and South countries will be affected the most. As those two countries will be focused on, the Eastern and Northern countries will most likely be safer.

“There's nothing to gain for us around the popular cities. It's not a guarantee that the attack will be successful, but the attack is pretty well planned for. As a result, many users will be clamoring to join the expedition. Also, since we plan on making our own clan problems with clans that already control the cities will arise.”

“I’ve heard rumors too that, like you said, the largest expedition will occur soon.”

I shook my head at An Hyun’s statement. We weren’t qualified to even participate in this expedition. Rather than getting needlessly hurt by getting involved, it was more beneficial to take it a step at a time and start from the bottom.

“Who can guarantee the expedition a success? Barbara, the largest city within the Northern Country that we are standing in, took four years to develop. That development required numerous preparations, and countless sacrifices to make it what it is today. However, attacking the mountains is a much harder challenge than developing Barbara was. In my opinion, they’ll be hard to overcome with merely four years’ worth of preparation.

“Hm... really? It does sort of make sense after you say it.”

“Soo-Hyun, does that mean there’s a lot for us to do at Mule?”

I can feel their reluctance to give up even after my spiel. I understand their confidence being through to roof due to ranking high at the User Academy, but them joining the expedition was something I could not allow. I put more force into my voice, then continued talking.

“Well, for one, we won’t have to worry about the Vagrants. The majority of the users and Vagrants will be directing their attention to that expedition from now on. As of right now, the users in Mule have already departed to join the expedition so I heard that all

development has halted. Since they gave up, this is a big chance for us.

Since I couldn't directly tell them all the details, all I could do was contribute an assumption with the words "this could happen." Since I know "the future," I could explain with confidence, but the end result still depends on whether or not they accept my words. I looked at them with a serious expression.

An Hyun, too, had a serious expression as he brooded over what I said. Yoo-Jung also looked as if she was contemplating something. But Sol hasn't said a word for a while... why? Why was she looking at me while pouting? Was she discontent? Was something wrong? I wet my lips as I broke the gaze. At that moment, Yoo-Jung raised her head and spoke in a serious tone.

"Soo-Hyun."

"Yeah?"

"I have a question. Well...Can I ask?"

"Yeah..."

I thought that I was detailed enough that they wouldn't have any questions, but it seemed like there were still some vague parts. I nodded my head since I preferred those that asked questions and speak their mind, like Hyun, instead of following every word I said.

As soon as I nodded my head in agreement, Yoo-Jung walked up right next to me then held my hand. Instead of asking her question, she behaved peculiarly by first bringing my hand up to her lips. Next, she opened her mouth wide enough that I could even see her teeth. Then...

“Nom.”

With a provocative look, Yoo-Jung bit my hand.

“... ..”

“... ..”

“... ..”

Mine, An Hyun, and An Sol’s expressions hardened.

“You said I could bite. So I bit.”

I couldn’t help but look at her with a startled expression when she smiled brightly when biting my hand. Yoo-Jung let out uncontrolled laughter as she gently let my hand go. An Hyun looked at her with a pitiful expression while An Sol looked around, embarrassed.

I tried to put on a straight face, but the atmosphere bothered me.

I even thought that maybe she was crazy because she was suddenly being random while we were talking about important plans. If this happened a long time ago and was another user (for example, Lee Ji-Young) instead, I would've been furious. However, it was Lee Yoo-Jung.

From my observations of Yoo-Jung, for someone that she disliked, she showed that dislike to a point where it was disturbing. Park Dong-Gul was a good example. On the other hand, when she was with people that she liked, she would act coy, like this time. I was able to swallow my anger since I knew of this. However, I feel like there was a need to tell her that there were moments when she shouldn't act like this. Perhaps An Hyun knew how I felt since he spoke and criticized her first.

“Hey, Soo-Hyun was talking about something important, so this isn't the time or place to be acting that way.”

“Sorry, I'm really sorry. Oh. Soo-Hyun, I'm really sorry. But, your expression was so serious that I did it without thinking.”

“Well our lives are stake here, so of course I'm serious.”

After hearing An Hyun's retort, Yoo-Jung avoided his gaze, but she still looked somewhat happy.

“While we were training, whenever we asked Soo-Hyun about his plans he always said that he was thinking about it. But to think that he was thinking about this... Honestly, I wouldn't have dared to think about something like this, but... but, we decided that we

were going to follow him, right? Anyways, I agree with the plan.”

An Hyun showcased his agreement by nodding his head. Moments later, he mumbled that there was no way that Yoo-Jung has the capabilities to think of something like this anyways and got kicked in the shins. An Hyun looked at her in pain. When their eyes met, he clicked his tongue and turned his attention to me.

“After hearing your words, I also think that going to Mule is a good idea. How will we reach it though? It’s located so far north that walking would take a long time.”

An Hyun’s normal question was able to get us back on track. I let out a deep sigh inside before answering in a calm voice.

“It’s best for us to get there as soon as possible. There are probably other users that are thinking the same thing I am. It’s best to have as few competitors as possible. Users that lack the skill to do well will probably give up on the expedition and the ensuing battle and head towards the undeveloped areas. Let’s... use the warp gate.”

A warp gate was available in all cities. The cost to use it depended on the distance, so shorter the distance, the cheaper the cost. Since Mule was located in the northernmost region, on average, it would cost 2 gold per person (1 gold = 100 silver = 10,000 bronze).

An Hyun had an uneasy expression.

“I heard using the warp gate is expensive...”

Instinctively, I was going to mention the weekly pay, but I organized my thoughts and answered.

“I heard that in developed cities, the cost to use the warp gate is reduced. There are rumors that they might stop soon, but I’m sure they’re still doing it. You guys saved up your weekly pay, right?”

The three of them looked at each other after hearing my question. Did they use it all? No; what would they have used it on? I myself had 1,000 gold saved up. I was getting worried over nothing, and the three knew it as they looked at each other and laughed. For a moment, I thought they were all crazy, but then Yoo-Jung extended her hand and I was able to see the small bag within it.

I accepted the bag with a confused look while Yoo-Jung spoke with an energetic tone.

“Hyun, Sol and I saved up the money we received every week. There should be about seven gold and 80 silver.”

“...Why should I take this? You guys earned it.”

“Not you guys, us.”

Yoo-Jung corrected my words. With a sheepish expression, An Hyun added on to what she said.

“We thought it would be better if you took care of the money rather than us.”

“Also, I’m an impulsive shopper.”

I had a blank expression as Yoo-Jung stuck out her tongue. The look that she and the rest were giving me birthed a new feeling that I’ve never felt before; it was a strange feeling, and it was taking over inside me. I forcefully quelled the feeling, then threw the bag in the air and then caught it again. I was a meaningless action.

But the weight of the money I felt in my hand was heavier than normal.

# Chapter 44 – Prepare For Emergencies #2

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<Reminiscence>

“We’re working hard in the shadows. Even though we’re enemies, it’s still nice to meet you.”

“Yeah. I’ve heard a lot about you. The Conductor of the Battlefield, Han So-Young. And you’re the sword master under her command? Your name is Jin Soo-Hyu, right?”

“Oh. Sorry. It’s Kim Soo-Hyun, not Jin Soo-Hyun.”

“Y’know, if you had met her first, you might’ve decided to work under her. She’s that charming of a user.”

“Your joke is lame. Where I’m at right now isn’t so bad. Also, I don’t like to betray people.”

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Thankfully, they still gave discounts for using the warp gate. Normally, we would have to pay eight gold coins, but thanks to the 50% discount we only had to pay four gold coins.

The guys had a surprised look on their faces as they stepped through the calm ripples of the portal. One would think that they would be used to it, as they’ve experienced it before during the Rite

of Passage. Them looking around was pretty much saying, “hey, I’m a novice user.”

I wanted to tell them that their smallest actions could make them become the Vagrants’ target, and that they should be careful. However, I didn’t want them to think that I nagged too much, so I ended up closing my mouth.

Entering the portal completely made my body feel like it was deep in the ocean, a cool feeling. I quietly closed my eyes. After this feeling completely filled my entire body with it’s refreshing energy, I opened my eyes again and the landscape of a shabby city appeared before me.

We had arrived at Mule.

To say that Mule was a prospering city would be a false statement. My members’ reactions were a sight to behold. Mule had straight roads and clean buildings. They seemed shocked to see a city like this after spending a long time in a large city like Barbara, where it was always bright and bustling.

It’s safe to say that it’s hard for an undeveloped city to catch up to a large city like Barbara, unless the city’s representing clan had amazing skills. I led the others along the uneven dirt road.

The roads of Mule were pretty quiet. The few users I spotted mostly had on shabby gear. As it was almost lunchtime, most were making their way out of the city. Unlike a large city, there wasn’t people every couple of steps— not that I was expecting to in the

first place.

Yoo-Jung looked around and asked me a question as she was not used to this.

“Soo-Hyun, what are going to do now? Are we going to leave the city right away?”

That would be dangerous. We need to first arrange somewhere that we can return to. I shook my head.

“No. We need to find an inn that we can use as our temporary base.”

“A base? Inn?”

“We won’t be able to get neither a house nor a clan hall if we don’t first register as an official clan. We’ll spend our time at an inn for the time being.”

I planned on stopping by an inn as we can eat breakfast and lunch there. I’m not too sure what the others thought, but I thought that this wasn’t that bad of a plan. Users that weren’t recruited to a clan or abandoned the User Academy halfway typically had a hard time even surviving day-to-day.

The first place people looking for information within a city visit was the pub, but I chose an inn for a different reason. During the first war, there was a time when I briefly stayed in Mule and

carelessly spent a few days at an inn.

The time I spent at the Inn passed uneventfully, but later on I was able to confirm an incidental fact about the inn.

I traced my memory as I walked along the main road, and ended up in front of a shabby inn. The others that walked behind me stopped as well. The sign of the inn was lit, and the name “A Modest Lady” could clearly be seen. Thinking that I’ve found the place, I was about to walk in with a small smile on my face.

Bang! Bam!

“Ahhhh! Someone save me!”

The loud noise came from inside and a dark bearded male user ran out of the inn. With a scared expression, he tripped while running out and ended up rolling in front of us.

But then he skillfully jumped to his feet and ran away without a backward glance. I smiled, as I was pretty sure I knew what was going on, but the others had on dumbfounded looks as they watched the guy run away.

“Don’t just stand there, come in!”

A thin, husky voice that belonged to a female came out of the inn. I noticed the mess as I dragged the others inside. There were tableware and tablecloths strewn all over the place. An Hyun let

out a moan when he saw the broken chairs and flipped tables.

A lady stood in the center of the hall while carrying an arrogant expression. That expression manifested as a lazy smile; it was as if she was extremely satisfied. The one thing I would point out that would make her stand out was her light gray hair.

She glanced first at me and then looked at the others before talking.

“New faces. Are you guys guests?”

From her lovely lips, a soft voice escaped that could melt any guy’s resistance. Unknowingly, An Hyun’s face was getting red. I sighed. There he goes again. Since I was immune to this kind of seduction, I was able to answer calmly.

“Yes, we’re guests.”

“To eat? To sleep?”

“Both, but we would like to eat first.”

She lightly smiled after hearing my answer.

“I like guys that are polite. Good. Babies. Hm, it would be difficult as this place is a mess right now, so go wait over there.”

I walked to the place she pointed and quietly sat down. The rest probably hadn't had the chance to look around since they were taken aback, but they were able to do so after they calmed down.

A Modest Lady was an inn that I hadn't seen in awhile. The inn had a total of three floors. The first floor served as the front lobby and the cafeteria, while the second and third floors were used for lodging. The important thing was that other than us there weren't any users inside the inn.

Soon, the woman walked towards us with a bright smile on her face. The tables and chairs were still in the position they were before. She lightly tossed us tankards, a cup, and the menu, but surprisingly after spinning once they all ended up in the middle of the table. The others saw this and their eyes visibly opened wide.

"You can order things that aren't on the menu. I can make pretty much anything. What would you like to eat?"

The others all looked at me. Briefly looking at the menu, I answered. I only acted like I skimmed through it, but I already knew what was good here.

"Four servings of the A course meal."

"Wow. Good-looking guys have good taste. It'll take a moment to prepare the A course meal, so sit tight."

Showing off her nice body, she walked into the kitchen. An Sol

looked at me with a dissatisfied expression and Yoo-Jung's expression was weird as well. An Hyun was the only one that looked at me with an envious expression.

“Soo Hyun. This place seems weird. Why did you come here?”

“Yeah. It's weird. Can't we go somewhere else?”

As soon as Yoo-Jung expressed her dissatisfaction, Sol immediately jumped on the bandwagon. I was confused. I didn't think that they had much of an issue with this place; was it that weird? Hyun spoke after hearing the two's opinion.

“No way! It seems fine to me. It's not that weird. Is there really a need to go somewhere else?”

As soon as Hyun stopped talking, the two females stared at An Hyun. Yoo-Jung looked at him with disgust while Sol looked at her brother with a disappointed expression. Scared by the way they looked at him, he coughed and quickly changed the subject.

“I-I'm really hungry. Let's talk after we eat.”

“Yeah right. Is it love at first sight?”

Hyun didn't answer. He just looked in the other direction. Breaking eye contact with her, Yoo-Jung turned her attention to me. Her voice became sharp. Sol seemed like something's been bothering her ever since we were at the Barbara Plaza. The way she

complained was not like her.

“Hmph. I don’t like the way she called us babies. We’re not babies.”

As soon as An Sol finished talking, Yoo-Jung quietly looked at Sol with a surprised expression. I’ve thought of Sol that way all this time, so I couldn’t say anything. Yoo-Jung briefly scratched her head and expressed her dissatisfaction. Hm. Why are they acting like this?

“You should’ve just chosen a better inn. It’s weird just from the looks of it. The inside is a mess. And that guy ran as if his life depended on it.”

Your personality is weirder. I wanted to tell her that, but I managed to stop myself and instead answered with a fake smile. It seemed like they weren’t satisfied with my reaction as Yoo-Jung and Sol kept complaining and gossiping about Hyun and me.

Swoosh.

“Ack!”

Yoo-Jung let out a weird scream. A woman was standing behind Yoo-Jung with a plate in her hand. An Hyun and An Sol looked like they were about to faint when they saw the woman. Despite the fact she was close, we couldn’t feel her presence.

With the same lazy eyes and bored voice as before, she started talking.

“Wow...this is the first time I’ve heard a unique scream like that.”

“You bit...?”

Yoo-Jung was about to let her anger loose at the woman’s calm expression. But then, her eyes widened and she stopped talking as the woman lowered her head and hugged Yoo-Jung’s shoulder. From there, she pulled Yoo-Jung close to her chest. Soon, Yoo-Jung’s entire was buried in that woman’s chest.

“Honey.”

While Yoo-Jung had a hard time talking, a bright light started to emanate from the woman’s body. That energy overtook our surrounding and soon, the air became heavy. An Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung’s face became serious as if their body hardened in response.

The woman started whispering into Yoo-Jung’s ears with her face still buried in her chest.

“Are you curious as to why that man suddenly ran away...?”

Yoo-Jung didn’t answer. No. The better answer was that she couldn’t answer.

I analyzed the situation instead of acting. The energy she was emanating was part of a spell called Mana Discharge, which was a basic spell for talented users. I admired her mana and the way she surrounded herself with that energy. I had wanted to fix Yoo-Jung's bad habit, and this opportunity seemed to just fall into my lap.

“That man came in and told me to take his order...but do you know what he ordered?”

An uneasy atmosphere was enveloping the table. It made it almost hard to breathe. I don't know about An Hyun and Yoo-Jung, but Sol should be able to resist it. Sol had a shocked look on her face. I knew they needed experience, however, and ignored the temptation to help them.

While thinking about various things, the woman kept on talking to Yoo-Jung.

“He said he wanted to suck on my breast.”

She laughed after saying that little tidbit, then turned her attention to Hyun and me and gave us a provocative smile. I wanted to her to continue I couldn't ignore the Yoo-Jung that was asking for help.

I slowly moved my right hand as I grabbed the cup that was on the table. An amused expression could be seen on her face as I took a sip and placed the cup down. A bit of mana gathered.

Tap.

The sound of the cup hitting the wooden table was atypically loud. At that moment, with my cup as the center, my mana spread throughout the area and neutralized her mana. Normally, I would shock the other user in retaliation, but I wasn't trying to be aggressive this time.

Moments later, the heavy energy that filled the room disappeared. An Hyun and An Sol leaned back into their chairs and looked at both me and the woman with surprised looks.'

Yoo-Jung was probably the most affected since she was the nearest to her. She was apparently breaking down as she turned her attention to the floor. Yoo-Jung instinctively felt it; she felt the vast difference in power between her and the woman.

“Huh...?”

Not knowing something like this would happen, the woman stood up and exclaimed. At first she was surprised, but then her expression changed to curiosity as I started talking.

“That man had every reason to be kicked out.”

Hearing my deep voice, the woman looked at me interestingly. Then, she nodded her head and answered.

“...Right? But he is a customer. Business isn’t doing so well...so, that’s why I told him to pay 100 gold.”

I had 1,000 gold.

“That man didn’t seem like he had a lot of money.”

“Yeah. Like you said, he didn’t have any money. Instead, he said he would give me something better.”

“Something better?”

Hearing my question, a wider smile appeared on her face.

“Yeah. He said he would give me a bunch of syringes.”

“Doe syringes exist in Hall Plain?”

An Hyun calmed down, and he felt fit enough to interrupt our conversation. Unlike his usual joking self, he spoke in a serious tone. The thought that men were sad animals briefly flashed through my head, as An Hyun obviously wanted to talk to her.

The woman thought that An Hyun’s act was cute, and answered with a seductive smile.

“Of course. I’m sure every man has at least one syringe that

contains nutritional supplements.”

“Excuse me...?”

As he didn't get what she meant, the woman pointed at Hyun's pants with her slim finger.

“You have one too. A syringe filled with white nutritional supplements.”

“White nutritional supplements? Oh...?”

“Yeah. He said he would personally inject it into my crotch.”

An Hyun managed to figure out what she meant, then his face turned red and he, too, stared at the floor. Sol was the only one that didn't understand as she still had a confused look on her face.

“I was going to break that syringe, but unfortunately... he ran away. He was lucky.”

She wore a disappointed expression as she said those words, then licked her lips. In response, An Hyun gulped and hurriedly squeezed his legs together.

## Chapter 45 – Prepare For Emergencies #3

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The woman gently placed the food on the table then carefully walked away. Her actions now were definitely different from how she acted earlier. The food that she placed on the table were salad, baked bread, cream stew, and meat pie. We had ordered the A Course, but it was hard to call this an A Course meal. Compared to other edibles, however, I remember it being pretty cheap and tasted pretty good.

We weren't really eating the food joyfully. As he was hungry, An Hyun was the first to pick up his spoon. Seeing the white steam rise up from the cream stew, I too took a bite. The aromatic smell and light texture filled my mouth and felt like it was melting on the tip of my tongue.

“Oh...this is really delicious! It feels like it's melting.”

Seeing An Hyun compliment the food, An Sol picked up a piece of bread and carefully took a bite. Moments later, Sol's eyes widened at the taste and she started chewing faster. Seeing the two enjoy their food made me happy on the inside. However, there was one person that hadn't touched their food.

Yoo-Jung normally doesn't consume a lot (other than alcohol), but she wasn't the type to be picky with food. But right now, she was playing with her food with chopsticks. Seeing the blank expression on her face, she was probably still physically shocked. Well, she was the one that experienced the woman's magic first-hand, so she was probably affected more compared to the others.

I myself have experienced something similar before, so I was able to somewhat understand Yoo-Jung's currently feeling. Embarrassment. Disdain. Shame. Helplessness. Only those that have experienced it personally will understand this dirty amalgam of feelings. I felt bad, as it was somewhat my fault. The fact that her mana was no match to that woman's proved that her skills were inferior.

But this was a necessary process. This kind of thing will be a good experience for the others; who knows how many similar situations they'll be in in the future.

We were now a group of users that has entered the vast world of Hall Plain. Not only do we have to compete against the other new users, but we have to go against veteran users as well. Comparing the members to the veteran members, my users were no different from beginners. Complete rookies.

They didn't know what it meant to be hungry. They didn't know how to act cautiously, nor know whether or not they should meddle in certain situations. In short, they didn't know what it meant to be desperate. Of course, I'm partly at fault for the way they were; they've never left my side and truly acted independently even during the Rite of Passage.

For now, they can say that they were lucky, but if they were to keep acting like this would they even be able to survive the next 10 years? I would say that there's a 99% chance they won't. There were so many times when I wasn't cautious and meddled in situations I shouldn't have and brushed closely with death.

Right now, we were on the Maginot Line. As the Northern Country was being secretive about their plans, the veteran users were uncomfortable about killing each other since no one knew with whom one's allegiance laid. For now, at least. The one enemy that people collectively recognize right now were the Vagrants.

However, after the First Alliance War breaks out, the situation will turn 180 degrees. In the latter half, even without committing PK, one will be able to separate allies from enemies. It was also common for your enemy yesterday to become an ally today— and vice versa. Users will have to survive in the rapidly changed Hall Plain.

I was planning on teaching my group some skills so that they can survive when that change comes. First, I needed to change their mindset. There were many chances to open their eyes in Mule, and A Modest Lady was one of them.

After we finished eating, I asked for two rooms. We had six gold coins left and forty silvers, as well as my stash of over a thousand. Food and lodging for a week costs 20 silver, so we had to pay 40 silver total.

I asked the girls to meet us in our rooms after de-gearing. An Hyun kept clenching his fist then releasing. His face was filled with excitement; he probably wanted to leave the city this instant. Yoo-Jung looked pretty down, and Sol seemed worried about her.

Still clueless about the current situation, Hyun spoke while continuing to exercise his hands.

“Soo-Hyun, this means that the four of us will act together while in Mule, right? We’ll catch monsters, explore dungeons and caves, and discover treasure.”

I internally let out a deep sigh. Why do I sigh so much after meeting these guys? The excited An Hyun was suddenly looking at me. I wasn’t planning on heading out at all. Before we do anything though, there was a desperate need to change An Hyun’s mindset. Despite my unusual reaction, An Hyun didn’t stop talking.

“Oh! We have to make a clan too! What do you want to name it? If you ask me, a name like the Golden Lion is way too cheesy...”

“I can’t make it.”

“A different— huh? Are you not going to make one? Why?”

“It’s not that I won’t, but I can’t.”

I scratched the back of my head with one hand, I let out a deep sigh. An Hyun was passionate when it came to combat training, but when it came to Hall Plain’s history or its other intricacies, he would doze off. If he had paid attention, he wouldn’t suggest that we make a clan right now. An Hyun saw the expression on my face and stopped talking.

After a moment of silence, I quietly started talking.

“The four of us lack the requirement of making an official clan.”

“Re...quirement? I heard that you can make a clan even with just one member.”

The requirement wasn't about the number of members. Hyun had only memorized the easy part. After calming myself, I continued talking. I'm sure that they'll be embarrassed when they look back to this moment once they were more experienced later on.

Clans are created when users with the same goal gather together.

In addition, not just anyone can make a clan. In each city only residents that have received the Angels' trust can give details relating to clans. They also operate the Clan Registration Center. It's fair, but also strict.

There was only one method open to us right now: increasing our experience. Of course, it's better if we stacked our achievements, but that would greatly affect Hall Plain as a whole; there wasn't a need for us to right now.

Unlike achievements, there are much more scenarios that can help one garner experience.

Caravans and the expedition will have to report their results after completing their task. They have to visit the temples located in each city and report the results of their task. The temple officials

will read the report and if they find the results important, they will either create an Inspection Order or request the clan representative to check the facts.

They were able to check all the information on the report. They could check what monster appeared in which location, the location of a dungeon or a cave, and what their exploration was like. It's possible that every little result was connected to the report.

When one believes that their performance level is high, they can register to become an official clan, but the group has to be evaluated. Despite receiving hundreds of applications every day only a few are approved every month, proving how strict their evaluation was. Also, once a group becomes an official clan, their potential power can't be ignored.

“Oh...”

After I finished explaining this to them, An Hyun seemed to be amazed. What was amazing about this? Seeing Sol, I could tell she knew this. Seeing An Hyun nod in understanding, I took a step forward towards them. When the three of them had their attention on me, I turned my attention to Yoo-Jung.

“How does it feel to step out into Hall Plain?”

“It's not too pleasant.”

Yoo-Jung answered with a weak voice. I nodded my head and

continued talking.

“Are you mad?”

“I feel victimized. I feel angry.”

Yoo-Jung answered right away. She realized how helpless she was earlier. However, knowing that the opponent can still grow stronger was somewhat of an advantage: it revealed to her how far and how hard she has to train to be competitive. As my provocation was effective, I continued talking.

“I’ve said this to you guys several times. Hall Plain is a constantly changing world. You never know what might happen. If that woman just now was a Vagrant, what do you think would’ve happened?”

None of them talked after hearing what I said. I wasn’t done.

“Be cautious. When there’s a great deal of tension you will be brought down, but you need to always exercise caution in Hall Plain. We’re not here to go on a picnic; we’re not here to find treasure. We’re here to survive so that we can return to Earth. Do you guys understand?”

An Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung all stayed quiet. An Hyun had his head down and Yoo-Jung and An Sol had a sulky face.

“As long as you know why you’re angry, that’s fine. But, there’s

no need to feel victimized. That just means you're that weak. If you feel victimized, train and become stronger. If you don't want to experience the same embarrassment you did just now, change your mindset and train fiercely."

I looked at their faces for a moment. I think they've somewhat realized their current situation. This meant that it was time to slowly execute my first plan in helping them grow.

I talked in a softer voice than before.

## Chapter 46 – Prepare For Emergencies #4

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“Yoo-Jung.”

“Yeah.”

“If you experience an unavoidable situation similar to the one just now, what would you do?”

“... I’m not sure.”

Yoo-Jung answered with a scrunched up face. I’m sure that she was frustrated with herself. Even if she experienced the same situation again, she doesn’t know anything and there was nothing she could do about it. The only choice she had was to endure. I thought about saying words of encouragement as they all seemed down.

“All of you are familiar with <Mana Discharge>, right?”

Since I’ve gotten the weight off my chest, it was time to start encouraging them. The guys slightly raised their heads and looked at me as my voice softened. I wanted to laugh because they looked like kids that got in trouble by their mom. but I had to keep it in.

“The skill that the woman used at the table is part of Mana Discharge. It’s a control ability that anyone can use as long as they can control their mana. It doesn’t require any special or hidden talents.”

Technically, it was a skill that's somewhat a control ability. That's why Yoo-Jung's expression changed after hearing that it was a control ability.

"Control... ability? Soo-Hyun, are you saying that we can use it as well?"

"That's right. If you practice it then you can use it. In addition, if you're ever in the same situation as earlier, you'll be able to resist and defend against the attack. Depending on how you dealt with it, you may even be able to counterattack.

"Teach us!"

Seeing them with an excited expression made me smile. If they continued to feel discouraged, I would have been really disappointed with them. After hearing a solution, Yoo-Jung's expression was filled with fierce determination.

First, I needed to teach them the theory behind Mana Discharge, then show perform example for them before truly training them. Faced with Yoo-Jung's excited expression, I raised my head higher and talked with a wide smile.

"Do you any of you know what each level of Mana Discharge is called?"

"The levels are Sense, Occupy, Coerce."

“Wow, that’s correct.”

Surprisingly, the one that answered was An Sol. She was looking at me with a yearning expression. As I tilted my head towards her, Sol’s expression brightened up. Maybe... the reason Sol was pouting earlier was that she was jealous of Hyun getting patted and she didn’t?

...

No way.

Anyways, Sol’s answer was almost correct. Above Coerce were the overpowering levels called Disassemble and There were definitely overpowering levels called Break and Destruct. Compared to the first the levels, however, they were so high leveled that it was impossible for them to learn now. I didn’t bother mentioning them.

“Starting now, I’m planning on teaching you guys a really powerful skill.”

The introduction was over. Now, it was time to get to the point.

Seeing is believing. Rather than hearing the same thing 100 times over, it was better to experience it to completely understand it. Slowly, I began to gather my mana as I turned half my body so that my back was to them.

While controlling my mana, I slowly dispersed all of it onto the floor. With my body as the focus, I drew a circle with my mana. Since I was so familiar with it, the mana was like an extension of my body. When my body finally stood still, I felt them looking at me with an odd expression. I closed my eyes and started talking.

“Hyun, Sol, Yoo-Jung. Starting now, don’t say anything. Move anywhere within the room while trying to walk as quietly as possible.”

They hesitated for a bit, but I felt them standing up one by one and quietly move about the room. They may be thinking that they were moving quietly, but if I wanted to I would be able to sense their every movement. When I heard a slight creaking, I knew all of them stopped moving. While my back still turned away, I talked.

“An Hyun, you’re 38 degrees north from my left foot, standing in front of the closet. An Sol, You’re 26 degrees southwest from my right foot, crouching behind the central table. Lee Yoo-Jung, you’re 90 degrees from my body, lying on top of the bed.

They gasped when I finished talking. Were they surprised from just this? I continued talking with a smile.

“This is the very first stage of Mana Discharge: Sensing. Many say that it just allows you to see even if you’re blind, but not many know that you can link mana to items in your sight. When you increase the radius at which you can use mana, you will also

increase your sensing level. Guys, you were surprised when that woman was suddenly by herself, right?

“Now that I think about...”

“Ye-yeah, you’re right. Soo-Hyun. Are you saying that once we’re familiar with Sensing, we’ll be able to detect whenever that woman approaches us?”

An Hyun had begun to understand. I nodded with my back still turned to them.

“Typically, yes. But it’s not omnipotent. There is a way to block your presence from being sensed.”

“Then...?”

This time, I gathered a larger amount of mana so that they could really feel it. After my mana started to overflow, I released it in the air. My mana filled the room as a heat haze filled the room. They started to look around the room in awe as I made another request.

“This time, hold up a number with your fingers.”

They got used to the atmosphere. After they fulfilled my request, I calmly started talking.

“An Hyun. Two. You raised your index and middle finger. An Sol.

One. You raised your index finger. Lee Yoo-Jung. Four. You raised your index, middle, ring and pinky...two-four-one-five-four-five. Oh jeez..."

Maybe it was because she didn't believe me, but in the midst of my speech, Yoo-Jung quickly changed her fingers. However, I was able to point it out without any issues so Yoo-Jung lowered her hand weakly as if she was amazed.

"Huh?"

"Huh...?!"

"Am-mazing...!"

After hearing their remarks, I finally turned around and looked at them. Their mouths were opened wide as if they had just seen a ghost. I continued to talk while maintaining the mana in the room.

"There are many ways to block Sensing. A person that notices the Sense could move fast enough that the Sense user can't react, or he could enter from above. There's also an advanced method of secretly mixing your mana within theirs. So in order to counterattack, you have to advance to the next level: Occupy.

"Soo-Hyun, was the skill that the woman used Occupy?"

I shook my head in response to Yoo-Jung's question. Occupy was a level that can be divided into two sublevels. In addition... the

skill that the woman used was the third level, Coerce.

“No. The skill that woman used was Coerce, the third level of Mana Discharge. One step beyond Occupy, it’s a high-level skill that instills one’s will into their mana. Of course, the power level varies depending on the person. Once you’re familiar with Occupy, you can defend against that kind of Coercion. At the least, you’ll be able to resist part of it.”

“Th-then, I want to learn it. I want to learn Coerce.”

Seeing Yoo-Jung talk hastily, I approached her with a small smile. Then I lightly flicked her forehead with my finger. Yoo-Jung pouted while rubbing her forehead as I continued to talk in a light tone.

“You can barely walk, let alone run. Unless you’re a genius, Coerce isn’t something you can learn overnight. You would have to train for at least three months. Take it one step at a time after learning Sense. Be patient.”

“Soo-Hyun.”

An Hyun called out my name while looking at me. Curious, I turned my attention towards him.

“About Coerce...”

“Jeez, guys. I told you, not yet.”

Hyun shook his head at my reaction and continued to talk.

“No. That’s not it. I want to learn more about Coerce.”

“Soo-Hyun, me too. What happened before was something that I experienced for the first time, so I didn’t know how to react, but...I want to see what Coerce really is. Please?”

I kept my mouth shut after Yoo-Jung added on to what An Hyun said. Mana Discharge is based on how focused the controller was and how effectively one controls it. You might be able to learn Sense fairly quickly, but going one step further and learning to push mana outside of your body and then instilling your will into it is much harder to learn.

However, I was able to sense a certain passion that I’d never felt before from Hyun and Yoo-Jung. For a moment, I remembered the first time I arrived at Hall Plain. That was the time I tried to do everything to try to learn something. I remembered the time when I had to teach myself instead of being taught by someone else.

Recalling those sad times, I started to talk as if I was possessed.

“The third level of Mana Discharge is different from the first two. Managing your mana effectively and with focus is a given, but beyond that, there can’t be any mistakes when releasing based on the circuit. But the most important and the most difficult part is that one has to put their will into the mana.”

“When you say will...”

“The key point is how effectively one is able to convey their feelings. There’s no point in further explaining this process. As I’ve mentioned, mana with will show you everything. Think about earlier. What did you feel, Yoo-Jung?”

Yoo-Jung scrunched up her face and thought for a moment before answering.

“My body was tired...and I felt like I was in danger. It was a feeling that I could possibly die...”

“That’s what you call a bloodthirsty spirit. That woman was telling you that she wanted to kill you, Yoo-Jung. She conveyed her feelings wordlessly by expressing her intention through her mana.”

“.....”

Yoo-Jung didn’t say much in response. But seeing as her face was so thin, she probably had goosebumps. An Hyun, on the other hand, had a confused look since he probably didn’t understand. I let out a small sigh. As my mana was still spread around the room, it might be a good idea to let them experience it again to satisfy their curiosity.

I called on An Hyun decisively.

“Hyun.”

“Yeah?”

“Starting now, I will try to kill you.”

“Huh? What are you...”

An Hyun shut his mouth after scrambling for a second to respond to my comment. He probably realized that I was going to show them Coerce, like what I did with Sense and Occupy. He was probably preparing for it in advance, as he kept his mouth closed and hardened his expression. In my eyes, his actions were pointless.

I focused my mind after I closed my eyes. I set An Hyun as my enemy. I calmed myself, opened my eyes, and released my mana. Then...

“Ah! Argh!”

His reaction was immediate.

My energy that filled the room was previously like clouds; now, it instantly changed into deadly energy. That energy filled the room, and anyone within would feel like they were being ripped to pieces. A bloodthirsty spirit was starting to break free deep within

me. Then, I focused all of that energy to one person: An Hyun.

I continued for five seconds. If I continued any longer, I probably would've fallen prey to the bloodthirsty spirit. I felt that it was a good point to stop, so I forcefully suppressed it. As soon as I gathered the energy back and stuffed it within me, An Hyun collapsed to the floor and started to shake. Yoo Jung's and Sol's lips were slightly trembling; they probably felt the spirit indirectly.

I slowly walked up to Hyun. Instinctively, An Hyun moved his body away as I approached. As if he realized something, he looked at me with a blank expression. I extended my hand to Hyun to help him up.

“No matter how prepared you are, once you're overpowered by mana there's nothing you can do about it. The will within the mana forces that person's unfiltered instinctive emotions onto you. Anyway, you did well.”

An Hyun shook his head sporadically. Suddenly, as if he had come to his senses, he grabbed my hand and struggled to get up; he was probably still in shock.

We looked at each other when he finally was completely on his feet, and I discovered something interesting: it was only for a brief moment, but there was a competitive spirit in his eyes. Maybe it's because he's a guy, but there was a warlike behavior not found in the girls.

After helping Hyun up, I looked at them, whose eyes were still glued to me, and continued talking.

“Anyways, even though you guys still have a long way to go until you can learn Coerce you now know what it feels like. As Sense is the first thing you should learn, you’ll be useless out there if you don’t know it. In other words, if you can’t maintain Sense for at least an hour don’t even think about going outside.”

Yoo-Jung quickly asked a question in response.

“Um, Soo-Hyun when did you have the time to learn these skills? We all took similar classes.”

I was surprised by Yoo-Jung’s question but was able to maintain a calm expression. Since I couldn’t tell them that I learned it before “returning”, I decided to leave a vague answer. I raised my index finger.

“I used my free time to train in addition to the allocated sessions. I also received a lot of help from instructors. Just so you now, it only took me a day to familiarize myself with Sense. Occupy took about two weeks. I was able to familiarize Coercion towards the end of training.”

“Oh. Then you were sleeping in that weird position to train the Sense skill?”

Thanks to An Hyun’s question, I was able to improve my

credibility. While I was laughing, An Hyun continued while sporting a confused look. “I thought you were just meditating.” Since I wasn’t interested in their reaction, I continued talking.

“Anyways, it took me that long. If you can do better, do so. I’m excited to see who’ll succeed first.”

I intended to slightly provoke them, and it worked. I just wanted them to try to surpass me, but as soon as I finished talking, Hyun, Sol, and Yoo-Jung looked at each other with a determined expression.”

“Well, I think I’ll be the first one. Just you watch Soo-Hyun.”

“Ha ha ha. Are you saying you’re more skillful with mana than me?”

“H-hey...guys...”

Seeing the two of them stare at each made me sweat a bit. It was like seeing siblings competing against each other through their grades in front of their mom. As time passed, I was feeling more and more like the mom of my group.

I had explained the theory. I had also shown them examples. The only thing left was the actual training.

Regardless of their inner feelings, I couldn’t disagree that their mindset changed. Filled with determination, they started training

right away. Mere moments later, their bodies were still and they started balancing their mana, eyes closed. I started to explain the finer details.

“Basic management of mana starts with a mental image. The basic principle of Sense is ‘ripple’ and ‘wave’. Imagine the calm sea; imagine... a single drop of water hitting the surface, then imagine... the resultant ripple. You can also imagine a drop of water landing on a piece of paper. Just create an image that you’re comfortable with and use that ‘feeling’ to move your mana within the ‘circuit’— your body.”

Truthfully, managing Sense is pretty simple as it was a Control ability with simple principles. Coerce, Break and Destruct, however, required advanced skills.

The important thing about Sense was how much attention one paid to detail and how long one is able to maintain it. One had to efficiently divide the mana they had and maintain a consistent flow.

Hyun and Yoo-Jung were trying hard to disperse it, but they were having a hard time. They were able to gather their mana and successfully draw a circle beneath their feet. But their faces already showed that they wouldn’t be able to maintain it for an hour. As time passed, the circles were becoming distorted. The circle’s shape became uneven; their mana flow became inconsistent.

The confident smile that they had when they first started disappeared and sweat started to roll down their faces— an ability they’ll use for the foreseeable future.

The advantages of Sense were endless. One can train whenever—and where— they want. Not only does it increase one’s mana, it also puts one’s body at its limit while doing so while simultaneously helping to increase other skills.

It’s just an assumption, but I think that my Third Eye was greatly affected by Sense. After observing myself and the surrounding, I was able to fight while maintaining my composure. I was able to predict my opponent’s attack and can respond with the best counterattack as a result. It helped to manifest my skill’s potential. Mana Discharge training was a way to kill three birds with one stone.

It’s been 10 minutes since they’ve started. An Hyun and Yoo-Jung were definitely a sight. Their determination had long disappeared and were both sweating a lot and breathing heavily. They looked as if they could faint at any minute.

I activated my Third Eye while observing them as I wanted to see how much they had improved.

『Player Status』

Name: An Hyun

『Attributes』

[Power 59] [Endurance 57] [Agility 74] [Stamina 61] [Mana 49] [Luck 61]

『Player Status』

Name: An Sol

『Attributes』

[Power 16] [Endurance 21] [Agility 24] [Stamina 29] [Mana 84] [Luck 100]

『Player Status』

Name: Lee Yoo-Jung

『Attributes』

[Power 48] [Endurance 52] [Agility 64] [Stamina 50] [Mana 68] [Luck 56]

An Hyun Hyun had an advantage when it came to physical stats. Excluding mana and luck, his other stats were steadily increasing.

He has the potential to become really strong as his agility, a stat very beneficial to Lancemen, was increasing rapidly.

Yes, his mana was low, but he still had points remaining that he can apply later.

Yoo-Jung's physical stats were about average. Her power and endurance were a bit low, but her agility and mana were pretty high. As she was a close-range attacker, having 68 mana is a big advantage and a blessing.

If I compared An Hyun and Yoo-Jung, I would say that An Hyun was in the lead. As a Lanceman he would be useful for uncountable scenarios in the future; my expectations in his potential rose. Had he chosen an Assassin then I would've been disappointed.

Sol had the lowest growth rate in stats when compared to the other two. However, I disregarded her other stats and focused only on her mana. Unless she chose to be a monk, there was no need to focus on power, endurance, stamina, or agility. Sol had high mana and high luck.

She had started out with 75 points in mana, and I was satisfied to see that it had increased to 84. Even though her improvement rate wasn't impressive compared to Han-Byul, the fact that the rate at which attributes increase decreases noticeably once in the 80s has to be factored in. For someone that had just left the Academy to have 84 points in mana, I was curious as to what her limit was.

# Chapter 47 – Dungeon Of The Alchemist #1

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In the end, they couldn't master Sense within a day. Yoo-Jung managed to maintain it for 28 minutes before she passed out. To be honest, it was quite an achievement for her first time, but I didn't mention it.

As it was an undeveloped city, there were only a smatter of buildings when Mule was first discovered. New ones were only built when there was a necessity. There was nowhere for me to train their physical bodies here, so I had them train in Sense.

I stepped outside of the inn to gather information while the others trained. Even if I was able to glimpse my past that was to be "the future", there was no guarantee that the information that I "remembered" was accurate. Minor details were better to be confirmed first before moving ahead. There was something I had to take care of first.

I first headed to the warehouse dedicated to users. You can think of the user warehouse as an inventory space that you can't carry around. According to how Hall Plain was set up, each user was provided with their own space that no one could touch. However, the caveat was that one can only store items that were purchased with GP here.

I managed to find the warehouse based on my memories. I carefully looked through the items that were inside. There were items that would be useless to me later, so I decided to take them all. After taking out some of the potions, I started to drink them all one by one.

You have used Angel's Tear. Six attribute points have been created.

You have used a potion to increase your physical strength. Your physical strength has been increased by two points.

You have used the potion of Vision. One additional attribute point has been created.

Seeing the messages pop up one by one made me smile. Wanting to check my stats as soon as possible, I loaded the status window.

#### < Player Status >

Name : Kim Soo-Hyun (0 Years)

Class : Sword Specialist Master

Nation : –

Clan : –

Title · Nationality : Owner of the Sword · South Korea

Gender : Male (24)

Height · Weight : 181.5cm · 75.0kg

Character : Lawful · Chaos

< Attributes > (You currently have 12 attribute points remaining).

[Power 94] [Endurance 92] [Agility 98] [Stamina 72] [Mana 96] [Luck 88]

< Achievement(1) >

Rite of Passage Boss Monster

< Innate Skill (1/1) >

Third Eye(Rank : S)

< Special Skill (1/1) >

Blade Master (Rank : EX)

< Undeveloped Skills(4/4) > (You currently have one unused skill point remaining.)

Close Combat(Rank : A Plus)

Last Man Standing (Rank : A Plus)

Mind's Eye (Rank : A Plus)

Battlefield Protection (Rank : EX)

The more I looked at my attributes and the unused points, the more proud I felt, but at the same time, inexperienced. An odd pleasure that I didn't feel even during the first war filled my body.

Two points from the boss monster, six points from Angel's tear, two points from the physical strength potion, and four points from the academy. Excluding the two points from the strength potion, there was still a total of 12 unused points. And, on top of that, there was one Undeveloped Skill point remaining.

I still wasn't sure where I should use these skills points. It would

be reasonable to add them to my stamina, but I couldn't help but want to use them on power, mana, and agility. It's not that I hadn't been thinking of doing so in the first place, but looking at the points made me have second thoughts. The fact that I couldn't use the points to rank up my innate skills was a shame.

The attributes were power, endurance, agility, stamina, mana. My developed skills were Close Combat, Last Man Standing, and Mind's Eye.

If others, no, if any other users saw my skills they would get annoyed and exclaim that it was a joyous thing.

In the end, I couldn't make a decision, so I decided to continue saving them. Since I've already absorbed the potions, I could spend the points whenever I wanted. I also wanted to think a bit more before deciding since I didn't know what would happen in the future; I wanted to be prepared in case there was something I wouldn't be able to handle.

I briefly contemplated whether or not to take the sword and the elixir, but ended up leaving them in the warehouse. They'll only be useful later on so there was no point in taking them with me now. Also, while the sword may look ordinary, users with a keen eye might feel something and the situation may get out of hand. Once I obtain Subspace, the token of top-ranked users, I'll be able to take it out and use it freely. Lastly, I took with me the 300 Gold I saved and left.

I saw the city's empty road as I turned my head. The information that I wanted wasn't the Northern Country's current situation, but

that of the task we were planning on completing. If we had the luxury of time then I would go to an unstable territory, get rid of the monsters there, and slowly grow in peace.

However, we didn't have that kind of time. Before the first Alliance war breaks out and the clans rise up, I wanted to at least have the qualifications of an official clan. Other than when a clan wanted to create a subclan, creating a clan in three months was nigh impossible.

In the end, the only option we had was to fulfill tasks at Mule and build experience.

A research institute of the ruins. The dungeon of the ancient alchemist, Vivian. Screaming Cave.

The first time around, the caravan that I was a part of accidentally found the Screaming Cave during my second year. However, I've only heard words about the research institute and the dungeon, so we had to do some research.

Most beginners had a mistaken preconception that caves and dungeons were easy to find. However, those places are hidden very well. Some were located within a barrier, and others required special items to enter.

I'm not sure if my Third Eye could figure out their locations; there were too many possibilities and not enough probability.

Anyways, I decided to head to the library first. The libraries in Hall Plain contained varied information and multitudes of books, and were open to all users to find whatever information they needed.

The current situation of Mule was a mess; the representing clan was making it a priority to maintain the developing city's safety. To decide to explore a dungeon or cave now was a dumb move. While "going to the library" was an absurd notion, I had no choice.

If the worst comes to worst, we could always explore the Screaming Cave. But if possible, I wanted to visit there last.

\*

Nine days passed. In that time, the others have definitely improved. Among them, Sol improved the most. At first, she had a tiring time controlling her large amount of mana. But after I taught her an effective way to manage and transfer her mana she started to rapidly improve every day.

As time passed, I gave them additional tasks. Instead of just using Sense, I had them move around the room while maintaining the skill. They were able to keep at it for 40 minutes while standing still, but they couldn't maintain it while moving for even a minute.

An Hyun and Yoo-Jung complained, but they became silent after I asked if they were ever going to fight while standing in one place.

I gave one additional task to Sol. Holy magic is one of the basic magic that a priest learns and among them was a spell called Shackles. After Cure, it was one of most useful spells in the priest's repertoire.

Ding!

After taking out a Silver coin, I flipped it into the air. The Silver coin landed on my hand after a couple of flips. Sol looked at me with a serious expression as I carefully explained how to train.

“Note where on the coin I'm holding. For magicians and priests, casting speed is just as important as the skills themselves. It's about how fast and detailed you're able to cast the spell. The key point is that you have to restrain it in the air before it hits the ground.”

“Okay!”

Seeing Sol smile widely while confidently answering made me softly smile. Suddenly, Sol stuck her head out towards me, which surprised me. After realizing what Sol wanted, I extended my hand and patted her on the head.

After Sol left with a goofy smile on her face as I prepared to study the documents I brought back from the library. Moments later, I heard the next room's door open loudly. A few more moments later, my door, too, opened loudly. I wondered who it was so I raised my head and looked over my shoulders. Yoo-Jung's was face peeking in.

## Chapter 48 – Dungeon Of The Alchemist #2

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“Soo-Hyun, what are you doing?”

After poking her head inside to make sure that I was in the room, Yoo-Jung quickly walked in. Her voice hinted at some sort of complaint. Seeing her pouty face, I thought that it might be the beginning of one of her annoying rants. I placed the document that was in my left hand down and let out a heavy sigh.

“What is it this time?”

Noticing my annoyed tone, Yoo-Jung pouted even heavier before speaking.

“Sol keeps bragging about how you allowed her to train in a different way. She’s been tossing and catching coins in the air... such a show-off.”

“There’s nothing for her to show-off. Also, is Sol really the type of person to show-off like that?”

“I’m being serious. She keeps tossing and catching coins...”

“She’s practicing restraint magic like I told her to.”

As I cut her off a disappointed expression floated onto her face. Right when I was about to pick up the document again, I heard

Yoo-Jung mumbling to herself.

“You’re so mean. You’re still having Hyun and me to train Sense.

“Because you guys need to. For beginners specializing in close range combat knowing Sense is enough.”

“But still...”

Despite me having warned her about it, Yoo-Jung still started to whine like a child. She was giving me a headache.

“Still what? Sol’s mana level was higher than yours from the beginning. For a support user to be at that level is more than enough. Also, Sol’s training won’t be really beneficial to you.”

Several days passed, and Sol had been the one to master the Sense skill the fastest out of the three. Sol was able to fully utilize the enormous amount of mana that she had— after she had been taught how by me. No matter who the instructor had been or how they had taught her before, she hadn’t progressed as fast as she did under me. Seeing herself improve day by day, Sol began to look at me as some sort of God.

During my first battle, I achieved the title of “Sword Master” while possessing only 45 points in mana. That’s why I was confident when it came to teaching Sol to manage mana level efficiently. It was reasonable for the others to believe that I was favoring Sol as I was making full use of my knowledge about mana

management.

Yoo-Jung seemed really dissatisfied that Sol was progressing so fast. Even after that one incident, Yoo-Jung would always come into my room and beg me for private lessons whenever I returned to the Inn. I tried to reason with her in the beginning, but, as it happened so often, it quickly became a chore.

“All I taught her was how to manage her mana. Anyways, go train your Sense. Look at Sol. She’s been practicing really hard because of how motivated she is.”

“Je-ez~! You’re always complimenting Sol! I’m going to go rest a bit.”

Wearing a dissatisfied expression, she slowly walked forward and took a seat beside me. After shrugging my shoulders, I turned my attention back to the map. Yoo-Jung observed me doing so then grabbed a few pieces of paper lying on the table near her.

“Ancient times...alchemy...revival, and...end? Soo-Hyun, what exactly is this?”

“There wasn’t much in it. You can just leave it anywhere.”

After finishing the document on ancient alchemy, I circled part of the map with a pen. Yoo-Jung saw the several circles on the map then continued to question quietly.

“What is this? And what are these circles?”

“Recording notes. Analyzing the map.”

“I’m serious. I’m curious about what you’ve been doing these days.”

Frustrated with my answer, Yoo-Jung raised her voice and whined. I continued to talk while still focusing on the map.

“I’m analyzing the records. It’s inefficient to just kill the monsters that are around the city. I’m trying to get a lead about a place by reading the old records on Mule in the past.”

“I see...you can find this lead by reading these?”

“Winning the lottery would be more probable.”

I had a bitter look on my face while saying so, but Yoo-Jung giggled in response. There were stacks of documents on the table; I had brought every document related to the alchemists and any hinting at the laboratory.

Even after I get a good idea, I would often look over the records again to get a better idea because of how much there actually was. There was no way for me to confirm the legitimacy of the documents’ contents, so following every word written on these pieces of paper could be seen as wasting time.

Yet that was exactly what I was doing. I didn't even bother looking at the other documents hinting at other potential discoveries; I was at least sure that there was both a laboratory and an alchemist dungeon in Mule. Else, I would've gone straight to the Screaming Cave.

Tired, I continued to talk.

“If it can be easily found, others would have chanced upon it much earlier. I have no choice but to put in my all...”

Yoo-Jung seemed to find this interesting as her expression brightened. She offered her help, which I readily accepted. I already knew what to expect in five minutes.

Barely past the five minutes mark, Yoo-Jung started to stare at me. Mentioning something An Hyun, something-something An Sol, she made the excuse that she had to train and left. With her personality, there was no way for her to endure this tedious chore.

Seeing her leave made me smirk as I turned my attention back to the map.

\*

More time passed. The once bare map was now filled with circles. However, the circle in some places overlapped. Nothing is confirmed until I visit the location, but here at least were some

assumptions.

Thinking that I was done, I leaned back deeply into the chair. Looking out the window, I found that it was already night. I suddenly thought of the others, so I used Sense on impulse and heard their quiet breathing. It seemed like they had quickly gone to sleep after training. Thinking of how much they had improved, a smile appeared on my face.

They met my expectations after a couple of days. Their desire to leave the city was blatant, but thankfully they decided to listen to my suggestion to train first.

There was only one reason they were following me, and not mindlessly so: they just trusted in me just enough to believe that things will work out if they just listen to me. The Rite of Passage, the User Academy— by following my instructions, they hadn't experienced loss even up to this point.

Even though they complained about their current training, they still improved. They only trained in using Sense, but their mana and other attributes increased as well. I was envious of Hyun raising two points in mana as a result, as well as his subsequent happiness.

In the beginning, I had entered the academy with the four points rewarded as the goal. Even so, I was disappointed that my stamina remained stagnant even after the grueling training.

As it was an issue I currently had no solution to, I ignored it. I

started to think that we were getting about ready to foray outside the city, but there was still a last, relatively minute issue I had to iron out.

That issue... was the group itself.

As long as it was monsters near the city, the exact makeup of the group didn't really matter. However, venturing further out exploring and advancing required a more balanced group. We had many close-range combatants, but an archer and a priest were common necessities for each party.

However, I wondered if it was truly a necessity right now. We needed a priest, but we had Sol. A magician wasn't crucial, and, if needed, I could act the archer and be the leader. My Third Eye, coupled with the fact that I've poured so much time into learning Mule, guaranteed that there was no chance of us getting lost.

But... if the others got too accustomed to the current group it could become a problem later. While I'm able to cover many of the roles of a group, I can't baby them forever; it wouldn't even be possible to on high-leveled explorations. This will be their first exploration so they'll learn a lot, but compliance will lead to issues in the future.

Knock, knock.

Someone knocked on the door while I was thinking about the group's makeup. My Sense detected a woman standing outside the door. I whispered quietly.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me. You already knew it was me.”

“.....”

Without getting further confirmation, the woman opened the door and entered the room. Of course, I had known it was a woman, but it was hard to tell that it was the innkeeper. To be honest, I wasn’t sure why a skilled user such as her was staying in Mule.

Her whereabouts were often unknown; the woman would disappear one day and reappear another. In the end, when she appeared again in Hall Plain she became the enemy of the clan I was affiliated with.

Her words to me then were still fresh in my mind.

If I had met this woman first I might’ve followed her. She was that charming.

There was a possibility that she was still unaffiliated with any clan as of now.

Operation Ragnarok Annihilation flashed through my mind. She had encountered the Princess of Death as her enemy and ended up

executed. The power she displayed, however, was carved deeply into my memories.

The woman had a light smile on her face. She had slightly droopy eyes and the mole near her eye stood out. She was a woman with a lot of charm. She spoke in a friendly tone.

“Hello. Mind if I come in for a bit?”

I’m not sure why she asked since she was already in the room. With a bitter expression, I nodded my head.

“...What brings you here so late in the night?”

The woman didn’t answer, yet she was closing the gap between us. The woman that stood in front of me could take my life in an instant in a moment of inattentiveness. Since I couldn’t trust her, I slowly started to gather my mana.

She still had a light smile on her face. Within seconds, her eyes changed to gray. As I was on guard from the start, I instinctively activated the Third Eye.

『Inherent Skill, Checking the Eyes of Temptation.』

『The Third Eye has been activated. Detecting Eyes of Temptation.』

Wow.

“Wow...am I only allowed to seduce guys that I like at a certain time?”

“...The others are next door...”

You must be joking. I had experienced this sort of attack so many times that I’ve grown weary. That’s why I was able to counter-attack, but I acted lightheaded and answered with while blushing on purpose. I needed to see what she was going to do.

“It’s okay...don’t worry about that. Anyways, today is the last day you’ll be able to rent out the rooms. What are your plans now?”

Coming this late just to ask about rent? She was definitely up to something. She was probably testing whether or not I was actually charmed. I carefully opened my mouth, acting a bit hesitant.

“I’m thinking about leaving the city tomorrow morning...”

“Leave...?”

When I told her I was going to leave, she carefully looked at my table. I noticed her expression oddly changing. Briefly glancing at the map, she probably had an idea of what I was going to do.

“User Kim Soo-Hyun.”

“H-how did you know my name...”

After saying my name, she took a step forward. We were at arm’s length.

“You’re that new user. The super rookie of the User Academy.”

The woman took another step forward. While I was sitting on the chair, we looked at each other while she stood in front of me. With her grey-colored eyes, the woman started staring at me.

“No matter how you look at it...well, you’ve only been a user for four months.”

The woman extended her hand and softly touched my face. I felt the woman’s soft touch on my left cheek. I purposely started breathing heavily while letting out a slight gasp.

“I was really surprised that day. Even with a small amount of mana, I didn’t think a new user that recently graduated from the academy was able to use Break.”

“That...”

“That was why I’ve been watching you and trying to gather

information...but I couldn't be certain of anything. I couldn't get a grasp of your plans. This is the first time a situation like this has arisen, so I'm confused. But the more I look at you, the more I think my hunch is right... there is something different. You're hiding something."

Oh, really?

She must've believed that I was completely seduced because she got closer. When she was about to withdraw the hand that was softly touching my face, I quickly grabbed hold. The smile on the woman's face grew wider after seeing my action.

"My hunches has never been wrong."

I purposely placed myself within the woman's chest. Like a baby that was being held in their mother's arms. To be honest, during that battle the first time around I did want to snuggle into her arms at least once. I wasn't sure if she knew, but with a satisfied expression, she pulled my head closer. I pushed myself deep into the woman's breasts.

"Hee hee."

I was savoring the woman's soft, tender breasts and her smell. Seeing me act that way, a slight smile appeared on her face. She petted my head for a while before stopping and started to speak.

"Are you hiding something? From the others, maybe?"

“A little...bit.”

“Then will you tell me what it is that you’re hiding...?”

“That...”

At my slight refusal, the woman hugged me even tighter. In a soothing voice, she spoke again.

“It’s okay...just tell me.”

Hearing her soothing voice, I slightly opened my eyes. I acted like I was contemplating for a bit as if I was about to confess.

“I won’t lie to you, I...”

“Yes?”

Seeing her excited face, I slowly opened my mouth.

“I like shadows.”

“What?”

I was looking at the woman’s shadow that was in the room. Her

shadow on the floor was what caught my attention. I answered her query while lightly laughing.

“Your shadow is really pretty.”

After I finished talking, I looked at the woman and saw her expression hardening.

# Chapter 49 – Dungeon Of The Alchemist #3

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Shadow. I was surprised by the word. Puzzled, I looked upon the user in my embrace. Completely contrary to the expression he had before, his eyes were a still calm. For some reason, I felt goosebumps.

Instinctively, I felt the need to move my shadow, but before I could do so an inherent fear rose inside me, forcing me to a stop. There was something cold around my neck. Their arms, wrapped around my body, and their hands, soon upon my neck.

I was going to die.

I didn't think any stupid last thoughts, such as why life could be so fleeting to end and at moment. My keen sense has kept me alive up until now, and that warning was in high gear. The moment that I move my shadow, the user lying within my breasts will twist my neck without hesitation.

The energy gathered within my arms slowly seeped away.

\*

Her arms weakly fell. I had somewhat researched the woman's skill beforehand, so I had kept my Sense centered on her shadow. However, even if I knew about her skills I still had to be careful. If I had felt an ounce of danger, I was ready to break her neck.

The woman didn't do anything. Realizing that her judgment of her target had been wrong, she took a step backward. She was naturally talented, yet wasn't overconfident about her skills.

I was starting to like her a bit. The woman in front of me was someone that knew when to step back. As I didn't have to kill her anymore, I activated the Third Eye. This time, I wanted to know everything about her.

< Player Status >

Name: Go Yeon-Joo (5 Years)

Class: Silhouette Queen

Nation: Babara

Clan : –

Alias · Nationality: The one that leaves a jet black silhouette at night · South Korea

Sex: Female (26)

Height · Weight : 169.4cm · 51.8kg

Characteristics: True · Chaos

< Attributes >

[Power 89] [Endurance 90] [Agility 97] [Stamina 87] [Mana 93] [Luck 82]

< Achievements(5) >

< Inherent Skills (1/1) >

Eyes of Temptation (Rank: A)

< Special Skills(1/1) >

Abyss Crowd (Rank : S+)

< Potential Skills (3/3) >

Shadow Swordsman (Rank: A+)

Sense Isolation (Rank : A+++)

Dark Shade (Rank: A+)

< Skill Comparison >

Kim Soo-Hyun: 540 / 600

(You have 12 attribute points remaining.)

[Power 94] [Endurance 92] [Agility 98] [Stamina 72] [Mana 96] [Luck 88]

Go Yeon-Joo: 536 / 600

(User does not have any attribute points remaining.)

[Power 89] [Endurance 90] [Agility 97] [Stamina 85] [Mana 93] [Luck 82]

I whistled in response to her stats. Adding up all of her attribute points, she possessed 536 out of a possible 600. There was only a four point difference between me and her. With her stats, she would be able to take command of a position with the Ten Tributaries.

Regardless, I was confident in beating her. Other than stamina, I had more points in every stat. On top of that, if I were to include the ranks of the inherent, special, and potential skills, I I would win without a doubt.

I made my decision. Once I'm finished with Mule, I will decide what to do with Go Yeon-Joo before I leave. If I recruit her and it doesn't work out then... Perhaps she was able to get an idea about my thoughts through my expression. When I looked into her eyes she flinched a bit. I quietly spoke with a stern face.

“I like women who have pretty shadows. And so, I like you.”

“.....”

“So...”

Go Yeon-Joo stood there with a serious expression. This time, I was the one that was touching her face. Now that the table had turned, I felt a certain pleasure course through my body.

“I hope you don't do anything stupid.”

At Go Yeon-Joo's level, she knew exactly what my words meant. After seeing her weakly nod her head, I stepped away from her breasts.

Go Yeon-Joo seemed to be thinking about a lot of things. Her usually calm face was replaced with a complicated expression, showing how she felt at the moment. After letting out a heavy sigh, she started talking.

"I understand your words. I know how to keep secrets."

"Great. I also like women that know how to keep secrets."

Go Yeon-Joo suddenly started talking formally as she put on a bitter smile.

"I was just curious. I have no reason to hurt you, so please don't misunderstand what happened."

"I would like to tell you, but I can't because of what happened."

Even if she had used her Eyes of Temptation with good intentions, that skill still belonged to the group that affects the mind.

Disappointed by my refusal, she slowly stood up from her seat. I signaled her to leave with my eyes and she walked towards the

door silently.

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When morning arrived, the others woke up and rubbed their eyes. Seeing them resume their Sense training immediately after yawning made me feel proud. If it were any other day, I would support them doing so, but since I was planning on heading out of the city I called the three of them to my room instead.

“Why did you call us?”

An Hyun mumbled while yawning with his mouth wide open while Yoo-Jung looked at him in disgust. Sol also looked embarrassed. I slightly smiled at Hyun’s actions and calmly started to talk.

“You guys are pretty familiar with Sense by now, right?”

Not used to compliments, they looked at each other with a confused look before taking on a sheepish grin and standing up straighter. Seeing them clear their throats was definitely quite the sight. I had a slight smile on my face, but I managed to hold any further reaction in.

“You guys trained so hard. Good job.”

“Soo-Hyun, does that mean...?”

Hearing Hyun ask in an excited tone, I nodded my head in affirmation. Today was the day we would leave the city.

“That’s right. I think it’s okay for us to leave the city, and also time for us to slowly start moving on.”

As soon as I confirmed, Hyun, Sol, and Yoo-Jung quietly cheered. Their expression clearly showed how excited they were about finally taking their first trip around Hall Plain.

“Hey. Listen carefully: unless it’s somewhere where it’s not possible, you need to get into the habit of training daily.”

I sternly advised them after seeing them get so excited, yet they just nodded half-heartedly; I knew that they weren’t really listening. I planned on saying more, but I decided not to. I wanted to see if they still felt the same way after we leave the city and experience various situations.

The laboratory. The dungeon of the ancient alchemist, Vivian. After contemplating about where we should head first, I thought the dungeon would be better. Both locations were of the same difficulty level, but based on the hints I found the dungeon should be a tad easier to tackle.

To arrive at Vivian’s dungeon, we had to leave through Mule’s north gate and walk deep into the Forest of Darkness. The Forest of Darkness is located between the Northern country and the undeveloped area and was so large that even Babara could only

control two-thirds of the forest. It wasn't somewhere one can easily enter, so once we leave the middle part of the forest it would be safe to say that we would be in the undisturbed part of the forest.

Despite the threat, it didn't really matter to me. Since I have experience in exploring undeveloped areas, I didn't think it was necessary to recruit a long-distance specialized user. I decided not to form a larger group. If we had more members, we would have to split the reward that much more. I was already busy taking care of the members I had, so I didn't have the luxury to take care of more.

I took out a bag as Hyun and Sol were jumping around the room due to the excitement. It was a bag with a spell cast on it. As a bag with a permanent spell was too expensive so the one I purchased only had a spell that lasted for a week. Once this exploration was complete, I planned to sell part of the reward to add on to the money we currently had. Then, we wouldn't be short on money while in Mule.

“I got you guys gifts for training so hard.”

Hearing the word gift, they all turned their attention to the bag. They might've learned of such bags while in the User Academy, but this was probably the first time they'd actually seen one. Like children who awaited Santa's present, their expressions were filled with expectation. An Hyun especially seemed to be looking forward to it, which made me feel a bit worried.

Seeing them wanting me to take out their present as soon as

possible, made me sweat a bit. After putting my hand inside the bag, I carefully took out their presents: weapons. After seeing them train at the User Academy, I ordered each and every one after contemplating about what would be the best for them.

One long spear, two daggers, and a wooden staff.

“Oh.”

“Huh?”

“Wow....”

After seeing the weapons that were set on the floor Hyun, Yoo-Jung and Sol expressed their excitement. After giving them the sign that they could partake, they each quickly grabbed their weapons. Hyun did mention his GP before, but I had instructed him to save it for now. There was no need for him to buy anything, so there wasn't a reason to waste money.

An Hyun grabbed the spear, swung it a couple of times and displayed a satisfied look. His stance was pretty stable; it seemed like he was somewhat used to the weapon.

“Wow, this feels amazing. I like how it feels when I wield it.”

Contrary to my expectations, An Hyun's swordsmanship was different. Since he had used a sword during the Rite, I expected him to learn to properly slash. However, he stabbed a lot more

during his training, thus the spear.

“You specialize in stabs rather than slashes. That’s why I chose the Spear. As you can tell, it has the same form as a Long Spear, but it wasn’t made to be thrown. During battles, I suggest paying attention to the distance between you and your opponent. Your defense will depend on how you perform.”

“Soo, Soo-Hyun. I didn’t think that you would think that far ahead...I’m touched.”

Hyun seemed to be moved by what I said. I turned my attention elsewhere. Maybe Hyun’s words were just a joke since I heard him giggling. Yoo-Jung was touching her daggers quietly and started speaking when Hyun and I let up.

“Soo-Hyun, what about me? These daggers... both of these only have a single edge?”

“That’s because I ordered them that way. Oh, that’s right. Yoo-Jung, I had to order custom-made ones for you...”

“Really?”

Yoo-Jung interrupted with a pleased voice that I had ordered custom weapons just for her.

“Your daggers were originally a katana— it’s Japanese. That’s why the lengths are a lot longer than ordinary daggers. It’s more or

less half the length of an ordinary Katana.”

“Hm~ it does feel a bit awkward. I’m sure this will be better once I get used to it.”

“Specializations tend to show during battles for close-range fighters like you. Regardless, just try using it. Finding the weapon that’s right for you is yet another type of training.”

“Right, but Soo-Hyun. Custom-made weapons are more expensive than ordinary ones, right?”

“Of course. Why do you ask?”

Immediately, in response to my answer, Yoo-Jung turned to An Hyun with a gleeful expression. Without asking, I realized why she was twirling her dagger with a boastful smile. Yoo-Jung turned her attention away from Hyun and back towards me.

“Then, that means my present is the most expensive one. Ha ha ha. Oh jeez. Hey, if you’re happy, just say so. Why can’t you just be direct about it?”

An Hyun listened to Yoo Jung’s comment with an annoyed expression on his face. Sol, on the other hand, looked at me with a disappointed look. Childish! The one that should’ve felt disappointed was me! I knew this sort of situation would happen, so I just looked at Yoo-Jung pathetically. However, I was surprised when Yoo-Jung suddenly looked at me provocatively and winked.

After letting out a deep sigh, I continued in a deep voice.

“Unfortunately, the most expensive weapon was Sol’s staff, not your daggers.”

“...What? Why? That’s nothing but a wooden staff!”

Yoo Jung’s voice filled the room. Sol pouted when she heard her say that it was nothing but a wooden staff. I just shrugged.

“Of course. The weapons that are usually used by magicians and priests are magical items.”

“Huh? Magic?”

Sol’s eyes widened when I told her it was a magical item. After nodding my head, I explained what kind of magic it was.

“Yeah. It calms the heart of the user and increases your effectiveness in managing mana. It’s only a low-level staff, so don’t expect too much from it. It’s still better than not having a staff though. With this, there’s no need to increase your mana now. Nice, right?”

“Yeah!”

A small smile appeared on my face as I saw Sol answer with a

satisfied look on her face. For a moment, I thought of how nice it would be if I had a nice and cute sister like her.

It was only for a moment, but Sol looked at Yoo-Jung with a boastful look. I carefully glanced at Yoo-Jung and noticed how twisted her expression turned in response to Sol's gaze.

I suddenly remembered when Yoo-Jung complained about Sol showing off. I had told her then that it couldn't be true; I couldn't imagine Sol doing something like that. But perhaps... it was something I need to think about again.

## Chapter 50 – Dungeon Of The Alchemist #4

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“Did you hear the rumors? Another dungeon was discovered in Mule.”

“Yes, in the Forest of Darkness. The dungeon belongs to Vivian, an ancient alchemist. Should I go to Mule again? Who knows? Maybe there’ll be something left.”

“You discovered the Screaming Cave. Don’t be greedy. Hm... that’s odd. I remember that there was a group of users that discovered it a long time ago.”

“Yes, they accidentally found it and were killed in the end. No, that doesn’t sound right. Huh? A total of three people. No, or should I say one? What I mean is that...”

\*

We quickly packed our belongings and left the Inn. Since it was early in the morning, I didn’t see Go Yeon-Joo. An Hyun kept on looking back at the “Modest Lady” in a way that hinted at disappointment about our departure.

Mule’s north gate was extremely bare in comparison to Babara’s. There were two guards guarding the gate, but you could tell how shabby it looks just by looking from the outside. It was hard to say that the representative clan was doing a good job just from its current condition, no matter how developed the city was.

“Good job. Please take good care of yourselves. May the angels bless the users.”

“Thank you.”

After answering the guards that saluted us, we exited through the north gate. Hearing the residents speak for the first time, Hyun asked with a curious expression.

“Soo-Hyun. What kind of people are residents?”

“The residents? They’re people that have always lived in Hall Plain. It’s the same thing as you having lived on Earth all of your life.”

“Hm. Are they any different from us? I heard this from the other users, but aren’t users considered nobility and the residents commoners?”

Nobility and commoners... The residents were weak. They were so weak that if there weren’t any users in Hall Plain, they wouldn’t be able to survive. Of course, the situation changes after Atlanta and the subsequent return to Tera, but right now the residents of Babara still needed protection by the users.

Once Mule was discovered and started development, the residents were pretty much out of danger. As for cities that haven’t yet been developed, no one knew what would happen to them.

There have been cases where cities were already in ruins when they were discovered in the Northern country. Of course, there hadn't been any residents there. People only assumed that they were killed by groups that invaded and attacked the city.

The natives often called users that protected them Apostles of God. They believed in the existence of a god in Hall Plain as some residents even receive orders from an angel. The Apostles were named so because they received Divine Order and Protection from the angels to aid in them protecting the native residents.

In reality, those users had been kidnapped by the angels and were forced upon powers, and was not a gift from God as the natives believed. That was why the residents looked at the users in awe.

What Hyun said about nobility and commoners was only the way users saw the relationship. The Western country was known for its freedom, but their relationship between users and natives was so bad that the residents were often treated like slaves. The Northern wasn't as bad, but the natives were often looked down upon and seen as being of a lower class than the users. They were both people, so I wondered if it was truly necessary to treat them that way.

While investigating the cities, dungeons, and laboratories that were being discovered all over the place, hints that Hall Plain was once a flourishing place were often discovered. From what I recall, they had lost it all and even their powers because of some issue. It was so bad that the natives of today were worried about the possibility of monster attacks at any moment.

I summarized this information to Hyun. The others seemed to be interested as they nodded their heads. There was no need to be particularly sad about the residents, but there wasn't any reason to treat them badly either. With that, I finished talking about the native residents of Hall Plain.

Typically we would've passed a couple of users by now, but I hadn't seen any. The effectiveness of the Golden Clan's plans was surprising. As the northernmost cities were practically empty, the southern, western, and those around Babara were probably filled with users. For a moment, I had an urge to join that throng.

I was feeling sentimental for a second, but that feeling quickly disappeared as I continued walking. As we gradually traveled north of Mule, the surroundings started to change a bit. The roads became more uneven and there weren't traces of humans walking through here. It wasn't so bad.

It meant that I could enjoy nature in its original state. As untampered nature was very rare on earth, and we had also been living in absence of nature, this was a welcome sight. When the cool wind started to blow, the members had on bright expressions and would often look around at their surroundings. Once the woods became thicker, I stopped walking and took out a map.

To the left was a forest. To the right were the plains. The Forest of Darkness was located, well, in the forest, not the plains. I checked just in case, but my memory was correct. After neatly folding the map, I placed it back in my pocket. I saw that there were many split roads ahead, but I headed towards north without any hesitation.

I started walking through the vast, green forest. The field connected to Mule's north gate was a light green color. But as soon as the distance to the Forest of Darkness shortened, the color became duller.

As we continued walking, more and more dark blue trees started to appear. The tall trees had a massive presence within the forest. We were nearing the Forest of Darkness's entrance. After making sure that the others were still behind me, I started to talk in a low voice.

“This is the entrance to the Forest of Darkness. Pay attention and be prepared.”

The deeper we walked into the forest, the more the gloomy atmosphere pervaded. The area we were at couldn't truly really be called a forest as hills could be seen clearly and the surface was too even. Here couldn't even compare to the forest that we were in during the Rite of Passage.

We were still near the entrance so there was some sunlight in different parts of the forest, but once we head in deeper, there wouldn't be any light at all. Since it was this dark in the morning, I'm sure that it'll be pitch black at night. I thought it would be best to find a safe spot for tonight, but since I was able to see my surroundings well I decided to look around a bit more. I looked back at the others and noticed them tightly gripping onto their weapons due to nervousness. Then—

“Wait.”

Right when I turned my head towards the group, I noticed something odd accidentally. If I hadn't turned my head, I would've probably missed it. Since my senses were on high alert I was able to catch sight of tracks.

On guard, the others looked at me, surprised. I first headed towards where I noticed the tracks and kneeled down to take a closer look. After seeing my expressionless face, they slowly gathered around me.

Someone... had passed through here, and not just a few people. I hadn't seen anyone when we left Mule, but they could've come from a different direction. It had been odd that there weren't any users, but it hadn't been weird enough for me to take special note. These tracks were pretty fresh.

“Soo-Hyun, why are you looking at the ground all of a sudden?”

“.....”

After looking at the ground for a bit, I activated the Third Eye in order get some detailed information. I heard Yoo-Jung ask a question as I looked towards the ground, but I didn't want to answer her right now.

“Soo-Hyun? Soo-Hyun!”

“Yoo-Jung. Soo-Hyun is Tracking, so wait...”

“Tracking...? Oh, but aren’t long-range users or assassins usually the ones that use Track?”

“That’s true, but I heard that if you have a lot of experience or if you learn it somehow you would be able to use it too. Although the information you glean might not be as detailed as those that specialize in tracking would.”

“No way. Are you saying that Soo-Hyun learned it?”

While filtering through the incoming information, I heard Yoo-Jung and Sol talking. An archer has the skill to lead the group, but they also have the skill to read the tracks left on the ground. However, since my Third Eye was an effective skill, it wasn’t difficult to gather data regarding the trace. I’m sorry Sol, but my inherent skill is far more superior to simple Tracking.

After analyzing the data, I stood back up. What I had done just now was exactly what Sol said. They all looked at me with a confused expression as I started to talk in a serious tone.

“I think a group passed through here two, maybe three, days ago. I think there were five, maybe six people. I don’t think they came from the north gate. They probably came from a different area... but I’m not sure if they were lost or if they came this way with the same goal in mind. It didn’t seem like they were lost, so their archer was probably somewhat skilled. Anyways, they were all walking in the same direction.”

I didn't know what happened to them. In order to see exactly what happened at that time, I would have to see into the past, like what I did during the Rite of Passage. It wasn't anything urgent though, so there was no need to. I was satisfied just from the inferences guessed through the tracks that I found.

Hyun and Yoo-Jung were at a loss for words after hearing my words. Even Sol's eyes widened because she hadn't expected me to explain in such detail. I just shrugged my shoulders in response to their gazes. Yoo-Jung tilted her head and asked, wearing a curious expression.

“Then, does that mean there's another group here?”

“I'm not sure. Maybe... or maybe not.”

Yoo-Jung asked a good question. I didn't tell the truth, so I answered vaguely, but Yoo-Jung looked doubtful. After letting out a deep sigh, I continued talking.

“It's like I said. There are footsteps going into the forest, but there aren't any that shows them leaving. There's a chance that they left in a different direction, or they could still be roaming. If not those... then they might've all died.”

At this, they all became worried and looked at each other. I glanced at them calmly then turned around. I had let them have their fun while we were in the city, but I wasn't going to go easy on them while we explore.

Noticing my serious expression and my silence, they started to walk even more carefully. Seeing how their footsteps became quieter, they were probably nervous. The deeper we walked into the forest, the taller the trees became and more of the sky was covered by the canopy. The sunlight that we saw near the entrance could no longer be seen.

We continued to walk for a while. The further we were from the entrance, the darker the forest got. It wasn't so dark that we couldn't see. But if it was this dark in the morning, I couldn't imagine how much darker it would get once the sun sets. Here was truly the Forest of Darkness.

I didn't tell them to do it, but the others were using their Sense. Thanks to me using my Third Eye and the others using their Sense, we were able to maintain our pace. There was nothing more I could say. Every step that I took was accompanied by the sound of legs sliding through the grass the huff of breathing.

Grr. Swoosh!

I heard a cry. Something was moving within the grass, disturbing the silence of the forest. I noticed its quick movements; it seemed to know who we were and was preparing to attack.

As soon as it stopped moving, the others held their breaths. They kept their guard up and were looking around at their surroundings. They probably missed that a monster was approaching us. Once it comes within the range of their Sense they

would notice, but I warned them as I had already detected it.

“It’s a raid. There is a monster approaching. Get ready to fight. Sol, stay in the center. Hyun and Yoo-Jung, turn your backs to each other and protect each other.”

“Hu-huh?”

“I don’t like repeating myself. Create a barrier with Sol in the center.”

They all had a confused expression when I said it was a raid. Yoo-Jung asked again, but after hearing my cold voice, she grabbed her daggers while trembling. Hyun was also wielding his spear and Sol quickly started casting a spell. After seeing them quickly get into position, I moved next to Sol. I was going to be the Priest Protector. As soon as I unsheathed my sword, I heard movement within the forest.

『 Special Skill. Blade Master has been activated. 』

『 Undeveloped Skill. Close Combat has been activated. 』

『 Undeveloped Skill. Mind’s Eye has been activated. 』

Swoosh! Clank!

While maintaining our defensive position, something moved within the grass and, at the same time, a screech filled the forest. Once it felt that we had noticed its presence, it had hidden within the darkest parts around us. A shiny tail quickly extended out of the darkness. Its targets, Hyun and Yoo-Jung.

“Don’t dodge! Block!”

I shouted after seeing them preparing to dodge, but An Hyun and Yoo-Jung had already dodged in opposite directions. They were able to dodge its attack through the usage of Sense. After side stepping, An Hyun was confused after hearing my comment. However, when it saw the tail coming for him, he became surprised and immediately blocked it with his spear. With a dull sound, I saw him counter-attacking part of the tail as it swerved towards Yoo-Jung.

Yoo-Jung ducked and exhibited her agility, but wasn’t able to completely block the tail. She had successfully dodged it, but that didn’t mean it was done; the tail passed by Yoo-Jung and slightly changed its course. Its new target was An Sol.

As the tail approached An Sol mid-chant, her face became blank.

# Chapter 51 – Soo Hyun's Change

---

They were stupid. Hyun and Yoo-Jung didn't stay in formation. Thankfully, I was acting as Sol's Protector. After fiercely glaring at Yoo-Jung I struck the tail that was flying towards us with the flat surface of the sword.

And after realizing what just happened, I had spaced out. Even though I did manage to strike the tail by gathering my strength, it was just a defensive skill to break its attacks. However, when the tail hit my sword, it started to scream and the tail shattered into little pieces. I came back to my senses after hearing the monster's roar.

Apparently, I had activated a special swordsman skill or an undeveloped skill. Different thoughts passed through my mind, but I needed to focus on the current battle. I started talking with a good amount of mana still within me.

“This is a Dark Scorpion. Their tail contains deadly poison, so be careful. Their weaknesses are the eyes and their abdomen. Since it'll be hard to get past their defenses focus your mana on your weapons and attack with all your might.”

Finished, I lowered my raised head. Sol still had a shocked expression, with her mouth open. She was still shocked that she could've died a moment ago. I thought that it was pretty pathetic, but I spoke to her in a low voice.

“An Sol. I don't think it's a good idea for a priest to stop casting

in the midst of battle.”

“Oh....”

Perhaps she was terrified by my comment as she began murmuring a spell. After letting out a sigh, I looked back to the front.

This was just a brief lull in the battle. Dark Scorpions tend to travel in pairs, so they’re somewhat linked. Once the one I injured cried out loud, the one An Hyun was fighting stopped attacking.

It stopped attacking, but only for a moment. The angry scorpion screamed loudly and released a violent aura. Then, the two Dark Scorpions started to crawl out of the darkness. A shocked expression appeared on the others’ faces once they saw how big they were.

We were attacked first, so there wasn’t much we could do. We were prepared now, but the Dark Scorpions were fast approaching. Both sides had their defenses up and it was hard to tell who would strike first.

After observing the earlier confrontation I realized that it was pointless to continue delaying the battle; my side will just run out of energy. I decided to attack first after judging for the right moment.

“Yoo-Jung and I will form one group. Hyun and Sol will pair up.

Sol use Restrain on your scorpion's tail. In that moment, Hyun you will need to gather your mana and focus it on the tip of your lance, then stab its body. Their skin is pretty tough, so don't think about taking it out in one shot. Yoo-Jung stand behind me. I will attack it in a way that forces it to reveal its abdomen. You need to take that opportunity to attack. You should approach after it attacks with its tail."

No one answered, but they nodded their heads. The scorpions were approaching us. Soon, they were caught in my Sense; I took a step forward; the combat resumed.

The part of the tail that fell to the ground earlier was still twitching around; it still contained deadly poison. I ran straight ahead as it raised what remained of its tail.

Once again, the Scorpion screamed as it targeted me, blue blood seeping out of its tail. Dodging it wasn't difficult as the tail only attacked in one direction. Once I stepped to the side, the tail passed by and struck only air.

And during that time, I shortened the distance between myself and the monster. Feeling that Yoo-Jung was behind me, I slowly lowered my sword. In that moment the Dark Scorpion almost seemed to grin.

"Soo-Hyun! Behind you!"

I felt a chill. A Dark Scorpion's tail was long and flexible. Even though its first attack only allows them to attack in one direction,

but it can move in whichever direction it wanted as it stretches. It was possible to attack in that window. It seemed like it wanted to attack the back of my head after u-turning. I smiled back at the scorpion and continued to run towards it.

Yoo Jung screamed as its tail was about to reach the back of my head. I shifted my head to the right, the tail grazing past my cheek. At the same time, I raised up my sword and placed it along the side of the tail, angling it so that its tail headed back towards its eyes.

The monster didn't expect me to dodge its attack right in front of its eyes. It was obvious that it didn't know that I was trying to change the direction of its tail. The skill that I just used was nothing more than an acrobatic skill.

The result was apparent. The Dark Scorpion stabbed its right eye with its own tail.

“Kyahhhhhhhh!”

Seeing the monster in pain made me smile. I kicked its face upwards as it raised its right pincer. Shocked, the scorpion's body was thrown up into the air. Its claws extended out as if admitting defeat. I yelled out as I saw its abdomen.

“Now!”

It was hard to say if this was the best timing. I wasn't sure what she was doing to prepare, but she took her sweet time coming

forward to attack. She used the daggers in her hand and attacked the Scorpion's abdomen in an X.

Seeing the monster cry in pain again, I put my hand on Yoo Jung's shoulder and kicked the scorpion back into the air. I pointed my sword upwards as the scorpion's body started to fall straight down. My sword pierced the center of my body, without the aid of mana. With just my strength, my sword cut through its thick skin. It hadn't taken even 10 seconds to completely take down one of them.

There was still one left. When I turned my attention to the other fight I noticed Sol release a spell: a white light shot out from her staff. Sol listened to my plan and had targeted the monster's tail.

“Shackles!”

Similar to a camera's flash, the forest was suddenly filled with white light. Sol didn't come off as a beginner because of her enormous amount of mana. Hyun instinctively closed his eyes, then attacked when he noticed that the tail wasn't moving at all.

“Ha!”

With a loud yell, Hyun stabbed its body with his spear. The Dark Scorpion raised its claws as it noticed it couldn't move its tail— but Hyun's spear was longer. The spear ripped through its skin and entered the monster's body. However, the Scorpion started to growl, seeming like it wasn't really affected by his attack. Hyun had succeeded in breaking through its outer carapace, but the

spear didn't stab deep enough.

An Hyun was surprised and removed his spear. He tried stabbing it again several times, but it didn't seem to feel any pain as it attacked Hyun with its tail, forcing him to dodge the monster's attack. The scorpion's tail was attacking Hyun violently which, at the same time, prevented Hyun from counterattacking.

“Wh-what is he doing? Why is he struggling so?”

I glared at Yoo-Jung as she made that comment, a confused look on her face. Sol was also just standing behind and watching. I felt really frustrated. What are they doing? Are they on a field trip to watch him fight? I clicked my tongue loudly and yelled at them as I ran forward.

“Did you guys come here to watch? Don't just stand there and help!”

They came back to their senses as both of them nodded. An Hyun was doing his best to defend himself. He dodged the Scorpion's constant attacks. When the monster attacked with his claws, An Hyun managed to block it. But that was all. Since he was so focused on defending, he didn't have the courage to attack it.

That was the moment I realized my mistake. I had thought that they were ready just from their stats. Their actual skills could be seen in a life-threatening battle such as this.

They weren't using their skills at all. It's true that my expectations were high as I realized that they still had a long way to go. If they hadn't trained their Sense, they wouldn't have been able to even match the monster's movements.

There were only two assailants before us. Yoo-Jung and I had taken down one of them. They were able to even just maintain the battle as it was a two vs one, but had it been a group ambush where we had been surrounded, they would've already been killed. I had a hard time just deciding on what weapon was right for them, but seeing them struggle against just one monster made me believe that there were other issues I should be concerned about. I attacked the tail, thus lessening the pressure on Hyun so that he could attack from the front.

“An Sol. Use Shackles again!”

“Okay! Shackles!”

She yelled out the spell as she received the command. A white light filled the forest and the scorpion's tail once again stopped moving. An Hyun seemed to have been maddened after being forced to defend as his face turned red. Hyun seized the opportunity and jumped into the air to attack as Sol cast the spell.

“Damn bastard!”

Hyun stabbed its body as he shouted out profanity. He didn't seem satisfied because he kept on stabbing the monster. He was probably utilizing his mana as the spear made noises whenever he

attacked. It pierced through the monster's skin. The scorpion was definitely in pain this time, as it fell forward and made a sad cry—as if it couldn't take it anymore.

“Pant! Pant!”

Despite An Hyun's constant attacks, the Scorpion stood up and scuttled a few steps back. Its body was a mess, but Hyun was also exhausted. I let out a heavy sigh as I decided to kick this one too. As I took a step forward—

“An Hyun! Move!”

Yoo-Jung, who had been watching from the side, suddenly started to run. She held daggers in both of her hands and gathered mana, evident by the sound produced.

Seeing Yoo-Jung run towards itself, it raised its claws into the air. The spell probably wore off as the monster's tail started moving slightly. This time, however, Sol cast another spell instead of just standing there.

“Yoo-Jung! Protect!”

A semi-transparent shell appeared around Yoo-Jung after Sol finished casting. Hyun looked like he didn't want to stand still because he picked up his spear and started running to help Yoo-Jung. I felt relieved that they were able to work together, but I couldn't ignore the fact that they were all over the place.

With Hyun and Yoo Jung's joint attack, the Dark Scorpion fell swiftly after enduring for a while. The monster's corpse was gruesome; its outer carapace was shattered into pieces, black blood seeping out. I would have never imagined that anyone would be able to take down a Dark Scorpion so idiotically... I was at a loss for words.

Hyun and Sol put their weapons away after seeing the corpse of the scorpion that we took down. Not able to believe that they actually took down the scorpion, they observed the corpse while trying to catch their breaths.

This battle was a lot harder than any in the Rite of Passage, yet we just went for it. The others bit their lips as they turned their attention to me. Had they a brain, they would be able to realize how awful this whole situation was.

“You guys....”

I opened my mouth to say something, but I held it in. I wasn't sure if my expectations had been too high or if it was normal for them to act this way. What exactly did they learn from the User Academy? It was so different from when I was a beginner. To be honest, I wanted to go back to the city and teach them everything from the beginning.

“Soo, Soo-Hyun.”

“Soo-Hyun....”

Their attitudes changed and looked uneasy when they saw my disappointed face, but I purposely turned my back and ignored it. Thinking that they still had a long way to go, I let out a heavy sigh.

I smashed my sword hard against the ground. The blood on the sword sprayed all over the ground, creating a half-circle.

# Chapter 52 – My Brother Has Changed

---

” Brother .I am sorry. “

” Brother.I am so sorry.

As I was walking through the forest for a while, I heard the children were mumbling behind me. At that moment, my face was wiggling. Even though I could not see my face, I already knew that my face was not good at all.

” Phew ... .. “

They were in great fear when they heard my sigh with regret. I turned my head to the children who clung to the side. After taking his breath for a while, he opened his mouth while maintaining his current pace.

” The battle with the scorpions makes me think a lot. It is not even three or four.....but I got lost with only one or two..... I think that the way I treat you guys now is a little bit wrong.”

“B...Brother... It is not .....

” I am talking to you right now .”

When he talks in a low voice to her, Yoo-Jeong shut her mouth hastily. Her eyes were shaking a little bit, and when I pushed a

little more, it seemed to pour even tears. However, I had to make my mind active as I decided not go back to the city until I got a performance.

” I always tried to make the best judgment in any situation. I rejected many clan offerings and chose you because I was confident in my judgment. However, now, for the first time, I am not confident about my judgment. I believe that the direction I want is also the benefit for you guys, but now I think that is not a good idea.

My tone was severe that I had never been before. They were quietly listening to me. Hyun was concentrating on my words with a serious face, and the Yoo-Jeong and Sol alternately looked at each other and just laid eyes on the face with a frowning face.

” I cherished you all so much. When Yu-Jeong left the city, you said we are together. Even though I did not express my feelings outside, I was pleased. ” But I did not know that the heart was coming back like this boomerang. Well..Maybe we ignore that even we knew that. Of course, I have the responsibility about this, but your attitude is a problem as well. Things that I have been worried about since the rites of passage have now come to an end.  
”

After hearing my words, Ahn Hyun chewed his lips and became a gloomy face. However, they could not say anything . I do not need to explain it separately . I think they know it all.

I stopped and turned back. Yoo-Jeong and Sol were about to cry. I once decided to end here. Because of ... ..

“Honestly, I want to go back to the city now. I want to pack at least a caravan and start again. However, on the other hand, I still want to believe you guys. Can I? You sure that can you not let me down anymore ? ”

In my question, Ahn Hyun was speechless. Apparently, Ahn Hyun had something different from the previous two people. I just wanted the anger, not the apology.

I was speaking with a strong voice.

” I will change the keeper formation from now on. It constitutes a triangle around the Sol. I will be at the head, and stand by me, Hyun and Yoo-Jeong. “

“ ... ”

Ahn Hyun stood beside the Sol with his silent face. Yoo-Jeong looked up at me and moved her foot to the next seat. Sol sent an uneasy look at the idea of changing the keeper formation, but I stood firmly with a mad face.

“Listen carefully. I will explain only once. “It does not mean that the triangle position has no keeper. I can say that all the people who make up each branch are a keeper. “

“It means camp must not be penetrated. “

I turned my head for a moment and looked ahead . I heard something moving slowly . After looking carefully at the front, I only glanced at Hyun . Hyun also moved the direction of the window gently as he knew my signal .I started walking slowly again .

” Right.Do not uses perception just to avoid evasion. Take reading to hit the opponent’s sword road; I went for a gap as to focus. When this camp collapses, literally, the sol also collapses. Be prepared to die and keep the formation. It is like being alone to help or support each other or to build a square for connection. “

” I will keep in mind .”

” And one more thing. I’m not the only leader to be a guide. There is another reason. What do you think? ”

” I do not know .”

Yoo-Jeong and Sol tilted their heads. At present we were moving at half the speed of the first half. I glanced at the surrounding trees and the large rocks passing by, and I grabbed the shaved sword.

” Right ... .. This can happen! “

I chucked a considerable rock that seemed to be overloaded with magic power. Shortly afterward, the rocks were split, and red blood rushed up to the surroundings.

” Fuck!Jongmin!”

” WTF! “

After handling the one who swung the sword, three people suddenly fell around us. Two men and one woman. So far as my observation goes, they are tramps for sure. They would have tried to take a surprise attack to us.

Yoo-Jeong and Sol seemed to be confused again, but the Hyun was relatively calm. It was because I gave a pledge in advance.They were embarrassed by the fact that she was the same person, but when they saw the tramps, they hold the weapons right away.

” Bastard! How you dared to kill Joingmin! Ahhhh!!!

” You said he is a new user!How did you notice the hideout!”

” Relax.We looked down on the enemy. Hey, you. How did you notice that we hid behind the rock? “

One female user spoke to me, but I did not respond. After analyzing the screaming vagrants, I communicated the information quickly to them.

“They are called tramp. Do what you learned at the academy. Never speak with him and just think him as a monster. Please feel free to kill. There are one shield swordsmen, one a warrior, and one wizard. We are entirely advantageous in number and

profession as well. Sol . What are you doing? The battle is on. Does anyone have a sense of who will win?

“Ha.....? Bullshit. Well, it is just young chicks! Let's beat them all!  
“

” Wait for a second ...! ”

The warrior who listened to me began to rush with an ax gracefully. Soon afterward, the shield was placed at the top, and it was seen following the ax warrior. A woman who looked like a wizard behind her seemed to have tried to dry them , but she was quickly casting orders, noticing that she was late .

I looked at them with pathetic faces. They were also on the Hall Plane, and soon after they had become tramps and, they were staring at me .It might have been thought that if the shield had broken down our formations first, and then the ax warrior had been overtaken by them, they would have been hit by us. It was clear that they looked down on us and knew that we were a new user.

At that time, the two users who were running in front of us seemed to blindly close their eyes. At that moment I also quickly opened the mouth to them.

“It is a light magic! Everyone close your eyes! ”

At the same time, the female wizard stretched her arms toward

us and shouted in a thin voice .

” Light !”

It seemed to have completed the spell more quickly than the sol. I was able to see that the spheres of light were generated before the eyes of our people and they were flashing and bursting. It seemed to have broken out for obstruction of sight. The problem is, there was the fact that we have learned to detect.

I turned my head and saw his eyes closed and Yoo-Jeong and Hyun are taking a defensive posture. At the same time, Sol bit her lips and made an incantation. Right. This is exactly what I wanted.

Even though I was hit by light magic, when I looked at him straight, the ax warrior was slowing down to the puzzled face. However, the shield test was on the way to the left while they did not see it behind. Maybe he aims at Yoo-Jeong.

These guys were also fundamentally unfriendly, abusive assholes. The hidden assassin and the female wizard who seemed to be hiding seemed to be fairly skilled, but the two who ran ahead were not like this.

As soon as I hit the sword, I saw a long spear spilling out from the side. The ax warrior turned on his face with a sad face, which he did not know he was going to attack from the side after the light started. Ahn Hyun closed his eyes and succeeded in blocking the warrior's career with the exquisite stabbing .

“No way ...! How tenderfoot found the perception?”

“It makes sense.”

I looked at the warrior who wandered in front of me while avoiding the spear. Zunk! The feeling of tearing through the flesh was transmitted through the sword. I turned my head to the side as I watched the warrior vomiting with blood .

Kwaaaahhhhhh!!!

The rustling noise of the metal and the iron scratched around. Yu-Jeong was also standing short sword and was blocking the assault of the shield swordsmen. Shield swordsman was also opening his mouth wide by looking at the Yoo-Jeong who prevented his dash.

“No...No way... I have...better....muscular strength...”

In fact, strength was higher for users with shields. As we pushed forward with each other back to the weapon, Yu-Jeong was pushed little by little. However , he overlooked the magical ability of the Yoo-Jeong. Yoo Jeong was able to spark vigorous cohesion by raising the power of magic.

“Yaaaaaap!”

.The lack of muscle strength is complemented by alchemyYoo-Jeong was steadily applying the basics learned at user academy. At

that time, I tried to attack with a sword in the other hand, but suddenly the spear handle that I was waiting for once again passed between me and Sol.

I twisted apart the sword once and immediately swung back and threw the head of the ax warrior. Moreover, the spear which Ahn Hyun was thrown pierced the side of the empty shield swordsmen.

The shield swordsmen the neck of the ax warrior , who has fallen to the ground, and the spear that is stuck in his side.

“Oh, no!”

I have no idea where they heard the fact that we are a new user, they were almost like new users to me. I do not know how they have become a tramp, but now these guys are showing me the end of the tramp that has not been able to fit in the hall plane.

It was a miserable failure.

Yoo-Jeong became a ferocious face once Yoo-Jeong looked at the user who was tearing down her face. Maybe she was doing it on purpose because I was looking at her. The two hands holding the dagger in his chest were trembling enough to be visible.

But there was still no break . There was still a female wizard left . It seemed like she was preparing for something a little magical from the beginning, but unfortunately, she was already finished with the spell. Sol lifted a brightly lit cane and, without hesitation,

remembered the spell, seeing a female wizard wading into a sweat.

“Shackles!”

As the flash burst, the light filled the forest, and the female wizard kept putting a spell. my eyes were conspicuous as soon as I saw the scene. What the woman just showed was double casting.

I was not able to do anybody as much as I needed concentration, which meant that the wizard in front of me was a certain level of user .But there was one thing that women overlooked. That was Soy's magic ability .

“Uh ... Huh? It's ridiculous! My magical power stats are over 60!  
“

And hands gradually became dizzy, she screamed and abandoned the spell when she was keeping and focused on resistance .It was a quick decision, but it could not be the opponent of Sol who had the ability of 75 from the beginning.

Though he resisted for a while, the sol's spell was not canceled but stuck firmly . I got hold of Hyun and Yoo-Jeong who ran right back. It was also because he was struggling with magical power by connecting it. I had a desire to experience the battle of the first magic series .

finally, it was able to see that the female users fell down. She could not resist the sol's magical power until the end, her whole

body was stiff and her mouth was open with a frowning face.

## Chapter 53 – My Brother Has Changed

---

I reached out to the front with an apathetic face, the female wizard looked up at me with fearful eyes. I turned my head down and exchanged her gaze. She was a typical cat-haired beauty with her eyebrows rising. I saw her shivering and got captivated by her delicate figure.

I always worked in the shadows, a situation like this it was a first time for me. There were not so many people who knew me compared to my activities, but those who knew me once called me a hunter.

Later on, the boundaries between the existing users and the vagabonds blurred. but negative image such as murder, robbery, and rape come to mind when one talked about the vagabonds. As the activities of the vagabonds became worse. getting an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, the existing users also made one clan. “The Clan” was a term referring to a group of users who hunted vagabonds.

The clan opposed vagabonds it does not care what one does if the opponent is a vagabond. Whether it is slavery, human experimentation, murder or rape. It is up to the hunter for whatever he does to a vagabond, how one does it. Even some existing users who knew the situation was not able to avoid hunters who worked for the clan.

I played around earlier for a while, but then I also accepted what I had become, a member of the clan. I drove the sword with the blood of the bastards identified. Yet, I was curious about the

information that might help to defeat a magician, ability or a sense.

“Player Status”

Name: lee beomi (Year 0)

” ability “

[Strength 36] [Endurance 28] [Agility 42] [Stamina 34] [Power 62]  
[Luck 40]

Again, as I expected, it was less than a year ago. one will have less experience as a lone player. If you look at the ability of the wizard as well, I was able to classify it as a support. An Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung are outstanding. The figure of the original survivors was also higher than the average of the yearly figures. If we met at rite of passage, you might have considered them as a fellow. But now Lee Beomi was a member of vagabonds who tried to kill us.

“Huh arrgaah ...”

I shouted in frustration. In the meantime, the bondage had loosened up. I stepped before her, raising my sword, it dripped blood. The woman said in an urgent voice, she had realized that death had come for her.

“Mercy, please don’t kill me!”

I looked at others who were staring at her words.

“Look. You can do it if you want. Anyway, this battle was fine. I’ve definitely had a fight with users, so it’s not different than before. Of course, there are parts that are ... still okay. “

“I’ll do what you say! Please! You’re from the same country, are not you? Yeah? This is not what I wanted to do. please, please...! “

Their faces were very subtle. It seemed good to hear my praise, but it was terrible when I saw the woman screaming with regret. I continued to ignore such farce and continued.

“But you should not be good at only familiar battles. Of course, if you build up your experience in the future. It will be okay, do not panic anytime, you have to do your own thing like you do. And as I said before, when you are dealing with a vagabond, do not put your hand on hold. If you keep them alive ... Ah. Wait a minute. It’s so loud. “

“I’ll give you everything! If you like, even my body, no a slave to be...sold off in an exhibition!”

I could not help but notice that her face showed frustration. I put the sword into her neck, she screamed and vomited blood out of her mouth and in a few seconds lay dead.

“Ah... “

“? ...! “

I pulled the sword from her neck and swung it to clean the blood, and I heard the voice of others' surprised emotion. The moment I got up, I came to the habit of working as a hunter from the first time. I felt like I was working in the Hall-Plain, and I thought to have a little bit of a change with the way I showed it to them.

I wanted to see if they could look at the woman who lay down and looked at the children shudder.

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Soon the day was falling. The sun, which was shining, completely disappeared, darkness was encroaching on the surroundings. So far we have not been able to stop because I have gauged the distance. Because it was not a distance to go in a day or two, I decided not to Stop.

The others were growing as they experienced combat. It is hard to be perfect, but there has never been a mistake except the very beginning. Today, we have had a total of six battles, and if it was not for the last battle, we would have managed to get away with it.

“Cure!”

“kkung(grunts) ... “

I looked at An Hyun lying down on the ground and groaning. On the top of An Hyun, who lay down in the grass, An sol was sweating and was putting on a healing spell. The entire body of An Hyun filled with scars from the wolves. It was the result of the raids of 16 wild blackforest wolves. Almost half of the eight wolves rushed at An Hyun, and I was not able to do anything. It seemed that he thought that An Sol was in danger and fought in desperation.

The wolves were not a tough opponent but had aggression and agility that was different from usual wolves. They also had an advantage in the forest of darkness. An Hyun started to put in place the training and proper battlefield coordination. he made a swing in which he shot down eight of them. Yet, at the end of the battle, he fell down with his body and I could not avoid work.

I took out the healing potion, I applied half to his body and the half to his head and the neck. He was groaning when he got injured and now more than necessary. Anyway, it 's a normal routine to get injured on Hall Plane. I have also taken appropriate measures with potions and I did not worry that An Sol would lose her life as a priest.

Anyway, after she had finished the treatment, An Hyun took a sigh of relief and looked at her anxious face.

“Hugh.... Fool. was lucky.”

“Give me praise, not a bad name.”

“Are you worried?”

“brother. Did the sun go east today? “

Yoo Jung thought about the words of An Hyun soon and realized that it was a teasing word. As soon as he woke up, he looked up at both of them.

“How are you feeling?”

“... I have recovered. I do not know what to do, but I do not have any problems moving. “

“So we cannot move ahead today. we should prepare for camping here. Also, before it gets dark. Well done. Well, I can still endure.”

“It is difficult. Without training, I would have fallen in the back. “

He seemed to notice that I held myself back even while I was swinging the sword without any disadvantage. No matter how many wolves came out, it is not a big threat to me. Even so, there was no reason for him to neglect to recuperate.

If you get wounded during combat and recover, you may get to increase your endurance. I also speculate that there is a possibility that it might help to express one of the latent powers,. Although he may see it as suffering now, he will have benefit for the future.

we did battle a few times today, so I thought it was enough. When I said that we were camping, everybody was busy, except for An Hyun. I handed off the bag that Sol is tying, and when I got out of the main island, I pulled out the horsepower seat.

yoo jung was sweeping floor and clearing the leaves and bushes, she opened her mouth when she saw me above her head.

“brother. Then you are sleeping in the forest today? “

“Huh. But why? “

“no. Is not it a little dangerous? The monsters may attack at night. I’m a little nervous at the time I was alone. “

“Well. I bought a horsepower stone seat for camping, so it’ll be okay. “

Luckily, they did not seem to express any resistance to poking Lee Beomi’s neck. I saw them talking to me without hesitation. Of course, they may be pretending to look like that. But I also killed a person, it would be quite annoying if I was too scared. Yet, at the user academy, they knew about the vagabonds. there was no need worrying like in the rite of passage.

The face of the yoo Jung turned strange looking at the horsepower stone. She looked at weapons, wooden staff, at their backpack, seeing the empty bottle of vials. finally, looking at the

horsepower seat, she opened her mouth with a confused face.

“Oh, brother.”

“What else? I’m in a hurry I need to prepare for camping “

“no. It is not. It’s not urgent. Where did you get all this? “

“What?”

When I asked her with a natural face, she pointed one by one with her fingers.

“weapon, Housing expenses, backpack, Horsepower seat, elixirs. And so on. That’s the money we gave you and your own wage would be 10 gold or so? I’ve heard that even a horsepower stone is unbelievably expensive ... “

“The horsepower seat used for camping is not that expensive. I have the energy to drive out monsters. And it’s not that good quality, so you do not have to worry. “

“still. No matter how you think, I do not understand that how you got all this in 10 gold. Where did you get the money? “

As soon as she finished, An Hyun and yoo Jung also turned their heads. I wanted to move over it, but when I saw their curious face, I was unable to get away. seeing their eagerness to listen to my

answer. I said in an uninterested manner pretending to pick up ground for camping.

“User Academy.”

“Academy? Did you have any money to give as a result of having excellent training results? “

“no. I got from the clan when I received the offer. “

“Huh? brother refused to join. But did they still give it to you? “

“brother. If you did not join, then did you took an advantage from it? “

When Yu-Jung and An sol asked, I sighed again. I could see their bodies jumping again. It seemed to them that I was still angry in my heart. It was only a short sigh and it was because of their endless questions, and I worry about my tongue-slip.

I had to repeat myself once again.

“they gave me a favor. Later, if I change my mind, I may join. It’s a simple gift, but there’s no reason to refuse. “

“Ohh... “

What is manipulation? It seemed to me that the children seemed to understand roughly. because it was roughly on the spot but it was not an excuse without a case. Every time I lied to them, I did not feel comfortable. But I can not even talk about my past, I answered with an uncomfortable face.

“it’s better to get it than to refuse it. That does not mean I can afford it. I did not give that much. If you do not get the results equal to what you have invested in this expedition. you may not be able to eat rice anymore in the future. “

“Hey. I hate that. So you asked me to check out my belongings. I do not like it. “

Black scorpions and wolves have no value in markets. Among monsters are money monsters and there are monsters that do not bring money. The reason for the increase in the number of vagabonds. is that killing monsters is not comparable to hunting the users to earn a lot of money. But, if you think of the benefit on the user side, of course, you can get a pretty good profit.

if it was not for the kids, I would have stripped down the vagabonds to underwear. But, we are on an expedition and there is kids’ gaze, so I have taken care of things that are appropriate. It seemed that I could not abandon the old habits. That still come under subconsciousness because I lived in so many ways in previous time.

I speak loud enough, “you can worry about money some other time. I will be looking out and will come back tomorrow. go prepare the camp for we will continue moving tomorrow. “

After I let An Hyun go back to bed, I reached out with a backpack. I felt inside of rucksack and it seemed to be a little heavier than it was before I started peeling the vagabonds.

I put my hand inside and took out the sleeping bag and I looked at Yu-Jung and An Sol prepare dinner. Both of them seemed exhausted, but there seemed to be no shock. There are a lot of things to supplement a little more, I will watch more, but I thought they could do rest assured.

## Chapter 54 – My Brother Has Changed

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I felt someone shaking my body while I was sleeping. As I opened my eyes in a split, a pair of eyes were looking down on my face. The landscape of the dark forest of dawn entered into my sight. Because of being in the middle of the forest, a cold chill hit my whole body. After turning the power of the body for a while, I circled the senses of the body and raised my body. My head was clear enough to be refresh and I felt good.

“There was no abnormality up here. right?”

“Yes. There was none. I slept nicely.”

An Sol calls me big brother when we are alone, but when we are with others she calls me brother(formal). It was a bit awkward. I felt like having received one tacking really well. I looked at her who lowered her head and said hello politely in a Korean manner.

After I responded with a soft smile to her greetings, I pulled my collar and turned my body to stretch. When I turned my head back, An sol was biting her lower lip with a lingering face. She seemed to have something to say to me. I cut in gently asking,

“Huh. An Sol. Do you have anything you want to say? “

“Brother... I... “

Hearing my question, She still looked at the ground, avoiding my

gaze. But within a moment She bit her lips and lifted head with a spirited determination. I did not know what She was going to talk about, but I also relaxed a little and waited for the next word.

“... wee... want to do.”

“... ..”

“I was too scared to go alone ... I’ll go with you. “

“... Come on. “

I shook my head in denial. But this time, An Sol did not back down. Despite my decisive Refusal, An Sol had not let go of her hand gripping my clothes as she pouted. I was about to pull myself free, at that moment I could see the glare in eyes of An Sol.

In the end, I decided to take a step back. But if you look at An sol, you could not help doubting it. It’s been over three months since I came into the Hall Plane, which means that An Sol is a 20-year-old. Of course, it is not so young, but She showed immature behavior at times.

I was not the only one who found his behavior sometimes very strange. I did not know at first glance, but as I spent a certain amount of time with An Hyun, Yoo-Jung and An Sol. more I felt that her behavior was strange. In the past, Yoo Jung has been asking to An Hyun once, but then An Hyun avoided to answer. It seemed like there was something he wanted to hide. I promised I

would ask again later if I had a chance, and then I stepped out of the camp with An Sol.

“It would be a bad idea.”

“... ..”

“An Sol?”

“Brother... Can you leave me and go a bit further? “

“I’ll stay still. Do not worry.

“I’ll surely believe it. You promised... “

An Sol asked two times and then took off into the bushes. I took the cigar out of my bosom and bit it with my mouth. When I lit the fire and sucked in my breath, I heard the sound of clothes rustling, which fell from the inside bushes. Soon after I heard the sound of pissing , I felt awkward. Either way, it was not pleasant to listen so I sucked in the cigar heavily.

Within seconds, I heard the sound of walking on the grass. From where i was it was bright enough to see her return. she could also see that i was still standing at the place she left.

“Thank you ah.”

“Ugh. I do not like it. Only the playing child brings nuisance repeatedly, stop being dependent on others.”

“He he. I’m sorry. “

When I saw her take it lightly, I turned to leave by turning and An Sol came into my arms. When I saw An Sol so suddenly, I dropped off the tobacco cigar that was in my mouth. Why does She suddenly run so aggressively? is it fun to see my embarrassed face. An Sol lowered her face in her chest gently.

“Brother.”

“Yep?”

“Honestly... Yesterday, I was a bit scared. “

“... Yes?”

After all was it so? It seemed cruel to have been stabbing the knife in the neck because I thought it was a little annoying. I still quietly waited for the next word. Because the body of An sol in my arms was not shaking as if she was scared of what happened. An Sol, appeared as she was enjoying in my arms. After a while, said with a cautious voice.

“Still... The brother is always strong and sweet. If it was not for brother, I would ... “

I watched An Sol playing with her hairs and I sighed inside. But it was also true that she now feels strange holding her.

The woman in my embrace will be a famous user in future who becomes a brilliant priest later on. Her reputation was so great that there was rumor that enshrined An Sol. she joined Odin clan, a gathering of top-level users from across the continent, it was such a great honor.

I have worked hard in my own way, but it was true that my reputation and ability are not less. As such, An Sol was a user at the height of my position at that time. It seemed like a strange feeling of encroaching on the fact that she was so enthusiastic and relying on me now.

I was drawn to such a mood, I held her in my arms. She was surprised to see my action, and I was able to see her face slowly warming up. My left hand stroked her ears, right hand stroked her ebony hair, and I whispered softly.

” ? So you’re scared ... ? should I just let that female Vagabond yesterday live? “

Hearing my words, She shook her head sharply. My heart was ticking, but I smiled because my reaction came out.

“Uh huh ... no. I will not be afraid. Soo Hun did that. To survive, we have to be like Soo Hyun ... Mind everyone to keep up. If it was not for you, we’d all be dead ... . Unconditionally, just stick to our

side and do as you please ... I will believe you too. I mean it, ... Please do not abandon me. “

Then. I realized the difference in words. This is what I am now sure is in their hearts. So far, if their attitude was blind willing, it would have turned into a firm faith in the forest of darkness.

“I will not. And An Hyun is wrong. I do not want to do it, but I want you to think what you want to do and work hard together. This kind of foolish ... “

“I know. We know. But... I want to do this for a while. “

I wanted to hold her for a little longer, but because I was not able to control her. she slipped off and nodded vigorously as She stroked her face again.

“I’ll do my best. I will not disappoint you ... So... “

“So?”

“Should not you be doing this a little longer?”

“ ... ... “

“Please pat my head. Come on. “

An Sol, understood what I had in my affirmation. Looking at her, I shrugged her shoulder and lifted her hand. But, from today, I feel that her perception of me has changed significantly.

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“How are you feeling?”

“Good. When I got up today and checked it, my durability increased by one. I feel like my body is more resilient. It feels more flexible than before. “

“Fuhu. As for close combat, I also care about durability. Otherwise, you will become a free body. “

“laughs”

An Hyun laughed pleasantly at the fact that the stats went up was satisfactory. It seemed that An sol pouted her lip from the side, but it seemed to be good as well. And when I saw An Hyun, I felt a little envious. I want to raise my stamina ....

If you get injured more than your ability limit can handle, your durability may fall. But, if you are just over or just below the limit, you can increase your endurance. Based on the assumption that the treatment is perfect. If you break your bones cleanly, your body will adapt to the wound to some extent. Just as it sticks harder when you attach it again.

I pulled the camp back, with An hyun, who turned around and showed off the steadfastness of his body. And after simple cooking with the morning fix, we headed to the Alchemist's dungeon.

I was convinced that the traces I saw at the beginning of the Black Forest were not absolute false trails. Now I am chasing traces of them. It seemed that it went in quite deeply as I saw that the trail did not disappear yet and continued.

forest of darkness from the mid-late part to the middle of the woods, it was a place where a lot of users could never see. Even so, there was a high probability that they were going into woods in groups. I was able to guess about it being related to the dungeon of ancient alchemist Vivian.

“I feel like I'm ridiculous today. i have a feeling of being chased.”

Ahn Hyun, who was on the right border, walked forward and talked. Maybe it was because of yesterday wrestling with the crowd of wolves. As I was talking, I still opened my mouth to see An Hyun, who did not slow down.

“Certainly that battle was the most dangerous. It is not uncommon but it is not uncommon to come out as such. Anyway, once we finish our exploration and return, we'll save your gloves. “

“Gloves... ? Ah. Defensive? The basic armor received from user academy is wearing ... “

“It’s leather, so it’s hard to expect such a big defensive effect. It is better to have a chain armor or a scaly armor that is easier to work than a plate mail.

“Aha. I know a little bit of weapons, but I do not know about armor. I thought it would be nice to think about the battle yesterday. I can swing more easy as I do not need to worry to defend it ... But I do not think it will cost you money to buy those things at once. “

At the end An Hyun was very happy. A real armor was a truly reputable, most of the money that novice users earn can not afford. It is because one is to live and eat just one more day rather than buy an armor. Now that we are on our first expedition and we have new weapons, it will be a tremendous luxury to other novices.

“I can not guarantee that you will be able to earn a certain amount of money even if you are a skilled user. since you can not hit the jackpot in the middle. In the end, I will have to gather money together from now on and prepare it one by one. “

“Well, do not worry too much because we have GP that we got at the rite of passage.”

“Impossible. I told you before, that is the last resort. Save the GP unconditionally. You’ll have to use it later. Let’s leave it as it is now. “

“Ugh. Money is a problem everywhere. “

I had a taste of it, and I could already hear An Hyun, saying that I was an old man, and nodded. If you are the most suited to Hall Plane among the current group, you can definitely count An Hyun. His defense is weak during battle and it is worth it, he needs an Armour soon in future.

After spending a few moments with An Hyun, I activated the sensation and the third eye. As soon as the traces of the users who got in first became clear, I could catch up with them by mid-day at the latest.

Of course, I did not even think about acting like them. We were fortunate enough to claim rights if we first found it. Existing users will know the right to the first discovery. But I did not worry about it when I thought I did not find it first.

<I found it by chance, it finally failed, and it all seemed dead. No, I do not see it dead. Huh?

Three in total. No one should have one. What do it mean ... .>

The original Alchemist dungeon was not revealed now. Two years later I found out the cave of screaming, and remembered that it revealed a few months later. But if the current caravan finds the alchemist's dungeon. And if my expectations were right, they were soon to killed. It was likely that they had failed to capture the dungeon and were all wiped out in it.

If they find it first, they can step back. I'll take a seat around the

dungeon and wait a few days and I'll see them turned into bodies. Rather, it may be easier to enter later if you treat some traps or monsters at the entrance. Also, if you keep the equipment they have, you will get a pretty good profit.

After I finished my calculations in and out, I started to make my feet even more busy. I wanted to proceed with the dungeon and explore the ruins of the research lab and caves of screaming. The kids came after me to speed up without knowing what will come after.

# Chapter 55 – Dungeon of Alchemist

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For a long time, we were able to move without any interference. As we entered the inner regions of the forest of darkness, the foliage created a scene like dusk. The dense foliage seemed to occupy a larger part of the inner regions. I moved quickly doing reconnaissance, to avoid any interruption. so we moved at a faster speed compared to previous day.

“It is strange. I remember meeting a lot of monsters today in the dream.”

“huff, huff, Dreams are always contrary to reality. Brother, can we take a break? It’s already half a day past, but we did not stop to rest even once.”

Ahn Hyun tilted his head, An Sol let out breathe. I did not say anything, but my face was whitish and my lips had cracks. Everyone followed me silently, moving closer to each other. At this point, I felt the need to take a break somewhat and I nodded to them and looked around for a while. As soon I gave permission, I heard them falling onto the ground.

The sign of caravan still remained. The fact that frequency of monsters is low, suggests the distance between us and the caravan is decreasing. It was also possible that the preceding caravan has already defeated the monster. But it still raises two questions.

If you had information about alchemist dungeons, you would have to go through all the surrounding monsters. Another

question is that if they fought a monster, why didn't we see anybody? or signs of fighting? Of course, the question did cross my mind and I can guess enough possible answers.

I pondered over it for a while then I did not think about it. Even if I worry now, it does not change the situation. The bottom line is to arrive at the dungeon of the alchemist following the trace of the caravan in the shortest time. In the worst case, they might not have found the dungeon, but they could have just come in to explore. But if I remember from my memory, It was more likely to be such. Moreover, we do not have much to lose, we can simply think of this as building up experience.

I was able to hear a little fuss from them, at the moment I had to sort out the complicated thoughts and had a little rest. I turned my head to see what was happening, I saw An Sol looking for help with an awkward face.

“What a useless girl wonder. it is just good for you.”

“fool. Do not you know that knowledge is power? This ignorant man. “

“There is a saying that knowledge is power. But it does not go with what you say. You just do not know.”

“what?”

An Hyun and Yoo-Jung were in discussion. For a while, it was

about the gold lion clan and the steel mountain expedition which are the best topic now. I agree with Ahn Hyun when I think about reality, but I thought it was not too bad to talk to them at least once.

“Do you think that an expedition assumes the natural key to it with our ability now? If you go there, you will be up to nothing and only suck on your fingers and be watching from sides. “

“Who told you? So I wonder why you are going to go to the expedition and go on a march. Do what you say. “

“I told you. It’s because I’m curious. What did you hear brother Soo Hyun say? Let’s take care of our situation now. Huh? Or do you have an inferiority complex?”

“what? Let’s see this, Mr.... “

When I felt the atmosphere change, I got near them and sat down. This just poured down the words of Yoo Jung, she looked at me with a harsh face and hurried to look away. An Hyun also scratched his head and was avoiding my gaze. I spoke in a calm voice after looking at them for a moment.

“There is no problem wondering. Soon life will be different for you, there is too little to do in the hall plane. Of course, it would be a problem if I wished to take part in because of simple curiosity in an expedition.”

When She heard it, I could see Yoo-Jung light up. Maybe it was because I took her side. Ahn Hyun poked his tongue out, but now he had a sour face. yoo-jung smiled smugly and asked,

“Brother. What makes the steel mountains so fierce? When I was in the inn, everybody who talked to me sometimes said that. “

“Currently, the Hall Plane is limited to East, West, South and North Continents. The central continent is still unexplored region. To get to the central continent we have to pass the steel mountains as a must.”

“Then it should not be that difficult, right?”

“Idiot”

An hyun did what I wanted to do instead. I laughed, as i was speechless at the words of Yoo-Jung.

“If you could conquer it so easily, someone would already have done it. The monsters we have encountered in these mountains cannot be compared to the monsters one would encounter in steel mountain. There are monsters of such degree that we can not imagine.”

“Then if you can go into the central continent beyond the steel mountains? what is in the central continent? “

I couldn't but shrink at the question of Yoo jung. Yet, I felt the

need to be careful because I cannot reveal anything suspicious. yoo jung had a curious expression but I did not see Ahn Hyun and Ansol. However, I was on my way to rest and it does not matter if they knew a bit about this.

“I do not know. If you go beyond the steel mountains, you will see the central continent, or another continent. But, I heard that it is confirmed in the ancient literature that there is a big city named Atlanta in front of the northern continent. It’s just an ancient document, but it’s a new big city.

“Atlanta ... What’s good about taking a big city? Can you get a home and live there? “

“Nobody knows that. but... Let me ask you one thing before that Yoo jung. What do you think is the most important thing for an individual to survive on the Hall Plane? “

She closed her eyes in thought, her hands played with her hairs.

“Power. Ability. Stats. “

“Right. That is, individual ability is most important. It is not to survive when there is power, but is more likely to survive anyway.”

“Yep. Then can users gain control of Atlanta? “

I turned to look at yoo-jung.

“It is possible. The northern continent is now getting saturated. dungeons of a continent is not infinite. All the usual expeditions are done. Of course, dungeons in Mule were discovered a while ago, but it is in steel mountain range. After the stabilization of cities like Mule is complete, there is nothing to be done after that. I can not help but catch the monsters that come out. It’s the same with other continents. Then the people of the North Continent, who are in complete development and saturation. They will no longer be able to build up their powers and abilities. It’s unclear if you can have a home to live, without worries. But everybody knows what will happen if you do not have the strength. Moreover, we would be unable to raise new users who are likely to be new arrival. “

The longer I spoke, it started to lack sense. watching them concentrate on my words was so scary.

“So if we cross over the steel mountains and start exploring Atlanta, we’ll have a place where we can develop. New monsters, new expeditions, new dungeons, new equipment and so on. First of all, we can easily raise our low stats, but if you reach the limit later, you will not be able to do so much. In Barbara a few years ago, I heard that all the users who got involved in the pioneering of city got achievements that increased their stats. there were other rewards monopolized by the users. So I’m going to use the flag and cross the steel mountains. “

Of course, there is another mountain to overtake after occupying Atlanta. At that time, users have to compete with users from other continents. It is a large city on the central continent, surrounded by Atlanta and Ragnarok, called Terra. And when I remembered

the sacrifice I had made to get the zero code in Terra, I was terrified of the moment.

When I was finished, the kids all looked at me with feverent gaze. they seemed quite surprised. Ann Hyun was as if in daze, suddenly asked with a quick tone.

“so brother. Would not it be better for us to stay in big cities then? Ah. Of course I do not doubt your choice. But when you say so, there are really lot of benefits. If we grow up in Barbara or other big city and take part in the expedition, “

“So. what do you think? would Kim Han be so arrogant in front of us? Ah-oh. even Thinking. makes me furious”

In the end, Kim han was one star. An Hyun and Yoo Jung showed a sense of agitation but only An Sol was looking at me with unshakable eyes. The confidence in her eyes seemed to rise unconditionally since this morning. I was worried that she might become a fanatic.

I paused for a moment and quieted them.

“Hmm. I told you before. If you listen to the instructors who are not from Golden Lion Clan at User Academy. you’d think it is foolish to go on the expedition now, and to take part in the expedition. Of course I can not be sure, but I think I can trust them more. “

They seemed a bit relaxed, but I did not feel a sense of agitation. I wanted to let them know right away about the expedition. The cataclysm and how much the Golden Lion Clan had suffered loss and Shamed. I had a sigh inside, but I still had to explain because I needed a good reason. Yet, some things were better unspoken.

“Huh! Listen carefully. But this is only my thought, so do not stick to it. Now the golden lion clan thinks, that stabilization of northern continent has progressed. And it seems to prepare for the expedition in haste. But I do not see it right. “

“Brother. But is it possible to travel before stabilization? Even if it is a little difficult, if you succeed, you’re going to hit the mark. “

“That’s right. The problem is that it’s the users’ life that is at risk. “

When I said the word “life”, he immediately shut his mouth. The atmosphere seemed to be considerably heavier than before.

“I once read the records when I was in Barbara. The first feeling that I felt after reading was disappointment. This happened in Barbara, it can repeat in case of Atlanta. To succeed in a steel mountain expedition, you have to develop the continent. when It is completely developed it is possible to extract the largest number of forces. And can secure a certain amount of new users. The North Continent is now developing, but it is not developed yet. Even if we have mule city right now, i still think the expedition is too early. There will be many who think so. The golden lion clan seems to be still out of mind when time comes it will be like former clan lord ... ?. “

“Huh? The former golden lion clan lord? “

A small mistake can lead to disaster, my tongue slip would do same. fortunately, I could say i had read the records before, but I should be more careful in the future. I nodded a little, gazing at An Sol with a gentle face.

“The most brilliant man in the current big city, Barbara. many times have you guys would have heard in academy? For A General inspection class to the chief of the Golden Lion clan, you must have achievements piled up....”

I was able to relax when I saw they were satisfied with the explanation.

“Originally Hall-plane extended western general city of Halo, Beth, and Dorothy. Before they took over Barbara. After stabilizing the eastern cities in his own way, he came to city of Barbara. It is said that he died because he could not cure the wounds. “

“Maybe if he had just been there, he’d already be in Atlanta.”

Fuck. I could barely shut up the words that nearly spit out. In fact, the time to enter Atlanta was the end of several civil war after the dissolution of the Golden Lion Clan. I admit to pioneering Barbara. But there was no guarantee that even if he was alive, he could occupy the steel mountains.

Anyhow, to survive on Hall Plane, the power of the individual is important. But it was also important to know a lot of knowledge in many ways. I took a little long break, but I thought it was a good time for the kids, and I stood up.

“Anyway, the situation is rough. Now the expedition has no qualification or meaning to take part, so just forget it. Now we just have to do what we can. “

I looked at Yoo Jung and An Hyun. They nodded and stood up. Now the time to use the third eye was approaching. Perhaps if my prediction is correct, I can probably find the alchemist’s dungeon in one or two days.

# Chapter 56 – Dungeon of Alchemist

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“Damn it!... Wolves! “

“If you have time to grumble, come into the formation!”

I quickly blocked for An Sol and pulled An Hyun into a formation. The number of wolves in sight was so large that it could not be counted at once. I felt a tingling sensation at the explosive change of the situation.

I bit my lips. The traces of the caravan had disappeared suddenly like crazy. The more you walk in, the stronger the trail is, it was normal, but the trace has completely disappeared.

I wandered around for a while to search for other traces, but I could not find any. It was as if they disappeared, like ghosts. In the end, I was attacked by the wolves, save for the third eye.

Even if it is the wolves of the forest of darkness, I am confident that I can handle more than 100 alone in my present condition. But the problem was others. The numbers seem to go beyond that I've seen over the past twelve times. It was natural for the first timers to be frightened by them.

“? Soo Hyun”.

“Do not step back!”

Despite my cry, An sol took a step back unaware of herself. Then the wolves began to howl at once. At the same time, listening to the sounds of over forty wolves. Ahn Hyun, An Sol, and Yoo-Jung were all hesitating their faces ashen. I could not hear what Ahn Hyun mumbled from the side. But without any pause, the wolves quickly narrowed the distance with us at once.

It was an unexpected encounter. The children were not ready to face such situations. Both Yu and Hyun had heated faces and soon grabbed the weapon. I did not stay back still, the situation was disadvantageous so I picked the sword and came out.

“An Sol assist me with protection for a while and step back a little. And from now on, I am leaving the formation. “

“Yes, But? Soo Hyun? Soo Hyun!”

I did not have time to answer, I grabbed my sword and stepped forward. When they saw me coming out, the Wolves opened their mouths and bared their teeth. There was a howl from behind, but this time, it was not a level enough to affect the battle. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the children could escape. After all, the answer was only to reveal my skills a little more.

Soon after, the first battle of the wolves began.

I went into the center of them with one step and wielded the sword with magic power. And the result surprised me by my own expectations. The power of a swordsmith expert was finally displayed. My experiences of training the sword and the

synergistic effects. The special and potential powers were pouring out power that was different from before. It seemed to jump up, pouring the blood as fountains from six wolves with a single cut.

“protect!”

An Sol cast protection over me just timely. The wolves, who were running ahead, were gazing at me with a flustered gaze. They could not understand what was happening, it was only a short time. Because of the fact that they still had an advantage in numbers. I went to a place away from the kids, and the remaining 30 wolves started to attack me.

I immediately took care of two wolves from both directions. Immediately turning around and cut off the body of the wolf that jumped. Hot blood swallowed my whole body. In the meantime, looking at the kids swiftly, fighting against wolves were fine. Still, the wolves still remained a lot. Yet, when I entered the battle which was disadvantageous for a long time. so I pulled the sword and swing it once again.

“Khay khayng!” Sling!

Wielding a sword one can fight against many opponents at once. With every strike two, three wolves dropped dead. When critical is blown, six wolves were sent flying like before. Already the sword I brandish followed like what could be expressed as flowing water. I learned the technique at User Academy.

“Khay khayng! khayng!”

su lung! su lung!

When the sword was waved in succession, the body of the wolves who ran to the front again was cut neatly. And it was at the moment, I felt it on my thigh. The wolf who did it as soon as I swung a sword around earlier once and lowered the head took a bite at my thigh.

“I get drilled only by my friends.”[1]

I whispered quietly and stabbed my sword down. Then the fountain rises from his head. After pounding a wolf that had fallen with a round face, I jumped around like a fortune. I wielded my sword for a while and then turned around and I could feel the surroundings quiet.

The battle was a lull. The number of wolves exceeding the first forty was reduced to a few. In that short time, more than thirty wolves were slaughtered. It is too much to show a little skill.

Gradually, I smiled darkly brimming with killing intent on the body. The wolves seemed to step back, who had only been watching for a long time until now. They started to run away after they snarled.

Where are you going to run away? I was caught in a battle, and after a moment of trying to make run with my injured body, I heard urgent calls from behind me. “Elder brother!”

When I heard the cries of the Kids, I was able to come back to reality. They have not been able to see my expression. Because I had my back towards them, but anyway, this fight did not have much sense. What do I do? What do I say? The thoughts of fill my head.

Then. The moment I lowered my head, I could see my whole body was soaked with blood. When I smelled blood for a moment, I had a good idea about my situation. The fact that I was able to fight in such condition made me surprised, but I could not help it. I just had a feeling that my move was definitely over the road. Suspicion is burdensome in smallness, it was best to cut off buds in advance.  
[2]

“Wow!”

“brother! are you okay?”

As soon as I heard the kids coming to me, I fell to the ground. Of course, I did not forget to breathe deeply. It would be better if blood came out. I did not know that there was a possibility that it would be frenzied to go in reverse.

“Whoa, whoa!”

As I sweated all over my body and I had a painful look, the faces of the kids came over me. An Hyun was taking out medicine from the bag, and Sol was quickening the treatment order. And Yoo Jung was about to take off my clothes. What, what? What are you

doing now?

“brother! brother! Stay awake! “

“Older brother! Older brother Oh!”

“An Hyun.Does not make a noise ....”

“Elder brother. This, drink this quick!”

As I saw Ahn Hyun pushing a bottle of medicine through my mouth, I shook his hand away. Yoo Jung tore half of my clothes all too soon made me lean to one side. Now I did not want to lose any more face in front of these kids.

“Wait, what? No trauma? surely... You hurt your leg badly? “

“A cough ... Please, everyone, just stay ...calm “

I turned my magical power slowly white smoke rose from my body immediately and saw An sol's face turn white. Probably I felt like honor student in front of An sol. An Sol which just learned a treatment order saw white heat fumes to go up from my body and her face turned with shock.

“Get out of the way!”

“kkyak! suddenly what happened?”

“Get out of the way”

She had seen with her eyes, then she leaned against my body. Soon, she slowly infiltrated the magic power into my body to check the situation in my body. I stood up to this time and raised the magic power steadily. So as I was awfully unstable at my feet.

“this is impossible”!

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Humph... Magic is running into congestion. It’s like reversing! “

“Reverse phenomenon? then... “

“Woah!”

After having finished An Sol’s words, she burst into tears and held her face. I felt her warm tears and breathing on my face. Only I looked at An Hyun and An sol. Their face had an expression, about Magic reversal phenomenon having understood it.

“damn... I should have hurried at the time ...! “

“what to do... How on earth ... “

“... Everybody quiet. “

I wanted to get up at this point, I barely managed to get up. Then, as for the tears, An Sol, wiped them away, An Hyun, looked at my face too. I had an expression of superhuman strength. I looked at here white heat waves that went up from my body and turned into a lotus position. they left my body immediately after having known what I was going to do.

“everyone...just guard around the perimeter for me.”

After seeing the kids nod three times, I slowly began to meditate. If you go into meditation once, you will try not fall too deeply because you do not know time passing away. I had better use the third eye anyway.

Obviously, the trail was getting stronger, and it quickly disappeared in a moment. It was prevention against evil to be the very likely to be. But the reaction of the prevention against evil side magical power must be felt, but the thing which was a kind of the course prevention against the evil that it was not prevention against an evil that could feel one spirit, and used art was the same.

After I exercised the third eyes slowly, I began to search around the forest with looking for every detail at the outskirts.

\*\* “Fuu....”

After the analysis, I took a long sigh. It was not much more than watching the facts that happened in the past in rites of passage, but it was much more difficult than simply viewing the information. I was able to see two pairs of eyes blinking right in front of me as I opened my eyes with the discovery of disappearing traces.

Blink Blink. Blink?Blink?

“.....”

“Older brother?”

“Brother?”

Ahn Hyun wore a dull expression with a bloody face and watched the surroundings. he turned his head to the sound of the An sol and Yoo Jung calling me, and I saw him looking at me. Then slowly, An Hyun seemed to be open like a sword. I was able to barely able to raise my body after I had difficulty pulling the kids out of my face.

“brother. What about your body? Is your body okay? Huh?”

“for now. there should not be any problems.

“brother!! this Quickly!! “

“no. Although it is under control, to reversal flow condition the

stamina potion...”

I wanted to say that it was no use, but I could not refuse to see the face of Ahn Hyun. After all, I had to get a pot with an awkward face. Somehow he wanted to feed this potion to me.

While I was gulping down the pot of medicine, the kids were following me up and down again. He shrugged with his face, and An Hyun opened his mouth with a dead face.

“That...Older brother. Us goes back this time from to this degree to will not be good.”

“Do not bullshit.”

“I heard from Sol. Flow reversal does not happen all at once, but if it does not completely heal once, it may recur again next time ... “

“I told you I have it suppressed for now. once we go back to the city later and get treat it properly. “

“still... “

“At the time to worry about that ... Ugh. I wanted to get a little better and my injuries were undone again. Did not you learn to never step back against monsters? It tells them that I’m not afraid of you guys. “

Of course, the kids did feel a little uneasy. This is the first time they've seen over forty wolves at once. Anyway, I was unable to say that there is no value to reconsider, An Hyun and Yoo Jung, lowered their head.

I wonder why I ran out of style. It was not me who did not keep up the formation. I did not think I would end up injured when I shot it like this, but it seemed that I did wrong.

Even though I have bruises I was fine, they were still worried about that strange white fumes. It was probably due to my pale face what worried them while activating the third eye (which was really difficult).

I tried to warm up with gymnastics, the kids stared at me, I said.

“Anyway, I do not want to go back. Even if it is me. So make your mind firm. This time, I think it might be that they went back, but if you show the same attitude the next time, I'll be really sorry. “

“brother. But... The magic reversal flow is ... “

“Only a minor obstruction. My body situation knows me well. Do not worry, you guys are good. “

After my words had fallen, the children seemed to be slowly taking their burdens away. However, it seemed as if the face of each of them was pale, and the atmosphere was loosened like

before they met the wolves. I was able to realize the position where I was sitting, looking at the fraud that might fall in a moment.

When I stepped, I could feel the gaze of the kids. But I never intended to go back. Once we come to the road. I had to turn back to where the trail disappeared in the middle.

The reason why I was not able to look for a trace was that course prevention against evil was set up as expected. Course prevention against evil is an arcane art. It is a career path that you can see another world in one step. At last, I thought I had a clue to the pensioner's dungeon.

## Chapter 57 – Dungeon of Alchemist (2)

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“I’d like to change the formation for a while.”

“Yeah? Ah. Yes. How...? ”

“One by one move to my back. And the person behind grabs the collar of the person in front. If you catch it, you should never lose it. ”

Though they asked questions once like usually one would, but soon moved into action as soon as my words fell. Small ruckus occurred for a while, but soon I was able to feel that An Sol came to my back and caught my collar tightly. I seemed to roughly understand why they pick that arrangement.

Behind me, An Sol, Yoo-jung, and An Hyun confirmed their positions in turn, and then I spoke with a calm voice.

“The space where we are about to enter now is course prevention against evil. If a single person enters a wrong way, we may get separated from each other. I mean, never leave your hands, and keep holding each other. If possible, step on my footprints. And if there is nothing else. Then we proceed.”

I wanted to add that they should not get surprised at anything. But I deliberately avoided saying anything unnecessary. I cannot predict what kind of situation we may turn into. We moved slowly, as I took one step at a time.

They followed my steps, but sometimes there was an expression

of question on their face. I stepped carefully while maintaining the third eye.

One step. Two steps. Three steps.... My gaze was pointing down to follow the footprints, but I was able to confirm that we were heading in the right direction. The colors of the grasses around us were regaining the original light. I was also convinced that the voices of the excitement bursting from behind.

Yet, there were no signs of alchemist's dungeon. Maintaining the third eye for long was tiring. I had to walk following the trail maintaining high concentration. So that I do not lose the trail again. The others followed behind me easily tracing my steps.

I did not know how much time had passed.

“Huh. Now you can take your hands off. ”

We had gone around and exited the space. After nearly 40 minutes of tracing, it seemed that all the alien air around me was gone. I felt a touch holding my collar. As much as I could, after one breath, I was really annoyed when it pulled from time to time.

I turned my head slightly and grabbed the hand of An sol for the purpose of letting go of my collar. Warm, warm sensation came through my palm. As I grabbed her hand, An Sol looked at me with a surprised expression, and then her face flushed red slowly. I got flustered in the middle of getting rid of her hands...

After I had forcibly pulled away her hands but she would not let go, I motioned toward the others. An Hyun and Yoo-Jung had received my signal and gathered by my side. Everyone was looking away from my face and I brought them all forward.

“Wow....”

An Hyun was surprised when he saw the castle built with old marble standing tall in front of his eyes. As I lifted my fingers and pointed at the front, An Sol and Yoo Jung also looked at the castle with a blank face. It seemed as if they were at loss of word to see the castle surrounded by the bushes, sparkle in the dull forests.

An Hyun, who had only been watching for a while, said with a loud voice, “This castle is ...”

“Dungeon of ancient alchemist Vivian and I know you want to go in...”

Seeing the children who were amazed, I also felt proud of myself. I had a lot of trouble when choosing my own abilities. Leaving the other great abilities and choosing the third eye was difficult decision. It is probably the most extensive and efficient to use on the Hall Plane. In the past, it was hard to find caves or dungeons even if I had to deal with all kinds of hardships.

“Soo Hyun brother... I did not know, but you really did find it. ”

“I did not know. I just followed the trail ... maybe a beginner’s

luck. ”

The eyes of An Hyun, who looked at me, were full of awe. I responded modestly. We will go through this kind of thing when going to go out and explore. What if I am surprised already? But it cannot be rejoiced. Now, I am resilient to the peaceful sights, but I am more aware of how much like hell it is.

Wow, “brother Soo Hyun. The castle is really beautiful. Speaking of dungeon, I thought of any strange, gloomy facilities “.

That’s right. Go inside and go down to the basement. I answered only inward to the murmur of Yoo-Jung. I did not want to lose the atmosphere already. An Sol also opened her mouth with a face full of excitement.

“I feel like seeing one fortress. One from movies ...”

I could see the bitter smile on An Hyun’s face as soon as An Sol said with the eyes which were light-headed. I did not understand it, but the word movie seemed to have a keyword for some reason.

Yoo Jung wanted to enter immediately, and An Hyun turned to me with expectation. Until just a short time ago, when the children who had become tired were simply changed to environment, their behavior changed again. It seemed that the kids were feeling excited.

“Soo hyun brother is so great. Obviously, when I passed by, I

could not see my soul. How the hell did you find this? ”

“Well. I’m just lucky. ”

“To this. I always know what you’re seeing. Did you really star in the sky as you say? ”

At the words of Yoo, I had only a slight smile. Suddenly, Kim Han – seum came to my mind. I do not know what you’re doing, but if you came with me.... I shook my head. When I was alone, I would have listened to it with tremendous harshness. Just the two of you then or ridiculously so wide apart wide as I thought.

Anyway, there was an early sense to put your mind down. no. It was not early, but it was starting from now. As I moved my way to the castle, the children followed me behind my back.

“Wait a moment.”

I stopped in front of the gate. Certainly there are traces leading into the castle. That said the caravan that found this dungeon was already inside. However, this time, I could catch five footprints. It would have been five people in the first place, or one person would have died on the way. I glanced at my head for a moment, and I carefully opened the door blocking our front.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Wow.”

“Oh....”

I entered into the long-awaited castle. As we walked into the castle, all the children were wielding their heads to see if they were told to see inside. The circular lobby inside the castle was hard to see because it was empty. Broken chairs and broken windows came into my eyes. It has an old-fashioned flavor, but unlike the seemingly slight gloomy aura.

Still, it was nice to see the ceiling made of white marble. The ceiling is made up of a large circular dome, and the pillars of the marble supporting the ceiling. In some ways, it was very similar to the church in Europe.

“what. But there are no treasures or monsters. Who has already poured it out? ”

“ ... ... ”

I think I can find it so easily. In the disappointment of yoo jung, I took the forehead for a while and lifted the remaining arm and pointed to the center. On the bottom of the direction I pointed was a wooden door with iron grommets attached to the floor.

“Oh. Secret base. ”

“...Is a door which leads to the dungeon. Some murderous secret facility....”

“. That should not be or that.... I hate older brother only scares me every day.”

I found the castle somehow and I seemed to be excited again. Previously, the Children, like puppies laid eyes and climbed up again. Once I had a chance to see it, I stepped back a little.

The original meaning of dungeon is dungeon. It was out of the question if there were no monsters in the castle lobby. But it was not enough to understand. Perhaps it was because there were no monsters from the beginning, or the caravans that had already arrived. However, there was no possibility of a monster because it had no body or traces of battle.

“Then should we enter here?”

“right. You cannot find it on the outside looking at it. ”

I simply shook my head and grabbed the handle. It seemed pretty heavy but it did not compare to my muscle strength already reaching 94. When I lifted it up, I heard the sound of a grizzly, and at the same time the door opened. Soon I could see that there was a big square hole with a square on the bottom.

“I do not think it’s very deep. Then I will go in first and come along one by one. ”

After I finished speaking, I immediately jumped. The dimly visible floor was getting closer and closer and I was able to

complete the landing with a thud. Hyun and Yoo jung also saw me go down without difficulty nodded each other and jumped at the same time.

Once again, the dust spread with the thump. In the first place, An Hyun, who has good physical abilities, was a casual face. But yoo jung was holding her feet with one knee down. When I approached her, I did not understand, soon Yoo jung lifted her head and opened her mouth with pain.

“Uh ... I landed wrong.”

As I watched the wasted Yoo Jung, An Hyun and I sighed with each other. When I raised my head again, I saw a still An Sol. An Sol hesitated for a moment from the top, but jumped off with a hint of Hyun’s “Ghost is caught by himself”. “I do not want to be alone.” Looking at An Sol leaping lightly ... But you close your eyes?

“Please receive me”

An Sol went down with surrounding eyes by all means and screamed. After having stared at me and others; is degree of leaning figure at. Yu saved such us after having seen it for disappointing eyes and breathed out. This saves it where and breathe out.(needs re editing)

Bullshit!

“kkya Oh!!”

There was a soft crushing sound. An Sol, which screamed at once, fell to the floor without any reason. She stroked her rear a few times, and then looked up at us with a bit of a sense of betrayal. I did not know that nobody would accept it.

Looking at An Sol that looked at us and rubbed her face, I felt something wrong. she fell from the buttocks to the ground, but I heard a soft crush, not a thump. I quickly raised my magic power. And....